

Lord Krishna

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Love Incarnate

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Introduction

The triad of Brahma, Vishnu and Maheshwar symbolises the three normal forces of life, and the three phases of living: life is created, then protected and, eventually, there follows its destruction, or re-absorption into the eternal life force.

Krishna is referred to as Vishnu in human form, and Vishnu is that face of the triad which protects.

The most vital force of life is to grow, to reach out, to evolve. It is power and the word for power in Sanskrit is *shakti*. All the devas have power. That power moves, creates and is active, therefore that is their Shakti—their wife or woman. The rest is only charming poetic thought and imagery. The philosophy is in the idea of power and in its activation.

Krishna both loved and is loved in turn by trees, flowers, birds, beasts, man, and that unending vital-force of creation,

woman. The outpouring of love is a protective force.

Love has many moods, many subtle ways of expression, and without love we are arid. Love is the sap with which the human mind and body are permeated, and which allows us to grow and multiply everything into happiness.

To the Indian—or to the Hindu Indian—Krishna is happiness, joy, felicity. We drift toward Krishna in a very natural manner, no intellection is necessary.

Krishna as a crawling child, holding up a round ball of sweet in his hand, is called Bala Gopala. This round sweet, which is composed of innumerable juice-filled gobbets, symbolises not just this round earth and all it holds, but each gobbet symbolises universes. Each is the sweet syrup of life enclosed within matter. The syrup is the sap, or moisture, without which nothing can continue to exist.

At every happy function in India something sweet is offered to the gods and guests. Often it is the same sweet that Bala Gopala holds in his hand—a laddoo.

The image of Bala Gopala asserts the human craving and natural drift of the mind towards more happiness and love. Wanting love, and wanting to love, the Hindu adores Bala Gopala and treats him as his own child. Women dress him in different sets of clothes, with different colours for every day of the week. There are lovely soft bedclothes on which Bala Gopala sleeps in the swinging cradle; waking, he sits on a throne and has twinkling, shimmering, gilt and glitter costume jewellery. It is a vast “playing Mother” game that need not end. Bala Gopala does not grow up, he is always the same.

Sometimes we say “he is a thief, a naughty child, he steals milk and curds, butter, he has broken the pot of butter-milk for the shards are lying all around”. Krishna Bala Gopala as the beloved child makes us laugh, and to laugh is to be happy.

The birth of Krishna is a story that is told over and over

again. It has been depicted in paintings for hundreds of years. Krishna, the child, is born to the mother who is filled with fear that her son will be destroyed by her enemies. He must be guarded. The night he is born is dark, moonless and stormy. Fear of danger flashes in lightning and in the lowering ink-black clouds. Vasudeva, the protecting father-figure, crosses the Yamuna as the fearful, dark river-water rises, threatening to snatch the child away; the rain, like sharp arrows, hurtles down. Vasudeva holds the child close to himself with love, and Vasuki, the vast power of life, a giant snake that sloughs its skin and regenerates its freshness, towers over the baby Krishna. Nothing can hurt him now. Love, in the process of protecting life, is protected. The birth of Krishna is a day when everyone fasts till midnight and waits for food and fun.

The time nears, it is here, cymbals clash, drums beat, music weaves waves of sound—songs are born.

Krishna is a legend, a truth, a collection of an endless variety of things in the store-room of time. Grandmothers elaborate on the story of Krishna, making it into an embroidered quilt.

In villages when the food and cooking is over, the men drift to the mud and earth-plastered platform round the huge banyan tree—or maybe it is a mango or a peepul but there is always that ancient tree—old men smoking, women in the shadows, children squeaking off-stage, while the younger group sit or loll around, then someone sings, recites from the Bhagavata or, in the village dialect, tells you the story of Krishna.

Those devoted to Krishna are known as Vaishnavites, as they are the followers of Vishnu. Vishnu is the power that sustains. And the human is sustained most easily and naturally by love. Vishnu is the loving and sustaining aspect

of that which man has called God. Vishnu with four arms holding the Conch shell, the Discus, the Mace and the Lotus, is Vishnu of the protecting force.

The four arms of Vishnu represent not only the four directions but also the four stages of human development, and the four aims of a Hindu's life—righteousness, success, pleasure and liberation.

In one hand is the Conch, which symbolises the origin of existence because the conch-shell has the inner form of a multiple spiral evolving from one point into increasing spheres. The conch is also associated with water—the first compact element. The sound from the conch when it is blown is associated with the first primeval sound.

Another arm holds the Discus, named Sudarshan. There are many meanings to it and one of the meanings imputed to it is that of the Universal Mind. The power of the mind, strong and pure, can be whirling fire that cuts off the heads of all anti-gods, and all forms of ignorance.

Vishnu's third hand holds the Lotus; it is the unfolding of the universe.

The fourth hand holds the Mace. This is the power of knowledge and dharma. Vishnu with four arms lying on the coils of the serpent, Sesha, is Vishnu, the Unending Potential or Immortality. Vishnu with two arms, peacock feathers in his head-dress, jewels in his ears, and a flute in his hand, is Krishna. All three are only different aspects of the same.

The beautiful jewels in Krishna's ears depict the beauty of the cosmos surrounding him. The flute is the call "hearing which, the most virtuous women forget their homes and comforts". Krishna is the "gay one" so the peacock feathers dance around his head. What does he care, it is the gopis who will go to him.

And who are these gopis? The senses, the natural tenden-

cies of the mind—the devis from Gokula, born on earth.

The natural tendency of the mind is to seek greater happiness, and the soft call of the flute, played on a river bank, is the most poetic form of a statement involving psychology, philosophy, and the poetic myths of a people.



Smoke from burning villages rose into the evening sky. At noon and dawn women, dragged from their homes, screamed their sorrow across the plains of Northern India.

Aghast, the stars looked down on the torn limbs of babies and children.

Villages had become homes of charred rubble; old men cowered in terror, women whimpered. Men, who were once soldiers of honour, had become either bullies spreading terror or, beaten into sullen submission, limped back to their battered homes to live on as best they could.

The village meeting-place mourned alone for no one dared to come to smoke and gossip or listen to the teller of tales. There was no song, no music anywhere. But in India, the whisper is never silenced. From house to ruined house, from villagers and women going to market, from the river bank where wo-

men gathered to bathe, wash clothes and fill their water pots, the whispers spread.

"Have you heard, he has overthrown his own father and usurped the rule?"

"The king is prisoner to his own son."

When the riders with swords came tearing past, the whispers were silenced for a while. Unhappiness brooded over the land where Prince Kamsa ruled the country surrounding Mathura, Vrindavana and Gokula.

In winter's dawn, the mist lay veiling the earth and the dew-wet grass raised a drenched face to the skies. The spirit of the earth seemed to be crying, "I cannot bear these cruelties, this unhappiness and the sorrows of my children any longer. The laws of dharma are forgotten."

A peacock flashed past trailing its long tail—it landed and screamed in the green of the mango grove.

Other birds awoke and sang and perhaps the earth sighed, and continued to bear the weight of her children and their wrongs; or perhaps the earth knew something.

For, one day, a new whisper was heard, "A deliverer shall be born." Who started it and how, no one could say, but it spread very rapidly. So rapidly, that his spies carried it to Prince Kamsa.

Kamsa was brave in battle and a brilliant soldier, but vain and arrogant, an ambitious and cruel man. His ambition made him usurp his gentle father's rule. His ambition and his reputation of being a fierce fighter helped him in marrying the two daughters of King Jarasandha, a powerful, fierce, cruel and rapacious man who ruled over the East at Magadha. His wives brought with them, wealth, and their father's soldiers.

Kamsa's court glittered with chains of gold and silver. His turban sparkled with diamonds but there was no sparkle of joy in the Prince's eyes—they glittered with malice and anger.

“Well, Minister, what are we to do now? The citizens are still mumbling and now there is this new nonsense of a ‘Deliverer.’ What and from whom are they to be delivered, may I know?” the Prince spat out.

The Minister wisely kept quiet and, instead of replying, looked towards the entrance from where the court announcer was leading in the Muni, Narada. Kamsa went to receive him and after placing before the Muni the usual offerings of flowers and fruit, sweet-scented incense and sandalwood, he asked to be blessed.

But before raising his hands to bless him, Narada advised Kamsa to be kinder to his people and give up those ways that were against the law. “The law of dharma will always win, Prince, not cruelty and unjust conduct.”

Kamsa laughed and said, “To rule one must be strong. If some get obliterated in the process—well, that’s the way it is.”

“The laws are unalterable, Prince. And remember, when the earth can no longer bear the terrible cruelties of man’s arrogance, God’s love takes human form and restores the balance.”

“God?” Kamsa laughed, “That is something that has been created to frighten the fearful. I fear neither God nor man, Muni.”

“Are you so sure? So arrogant? My poor Prince, you are doomed.”

“And who will be my doom?”

Narada looked at Kamsa, shut his eyes for a moment or two, then said, “Devaki’s eighth child,” and, smiling, walked away before Kamsa’s rage could pour out words of violence; for those who do not think, act, or speak violently, move away from an environment of violence.

Devaki was Kamsa’s cousin. Her father, Devak, and Ugrasena, the king, were brothers. Her marriage had been arran-

ged with Vasudeva, of the Shoora clan, a clan that was always having minor skirmishes with Ugrasena and Kamsa's clan, Andhaka. With Devaki and Vasudeva's marriage it was hoped that this trouble would end.

The whole of this area, with Mathura as the capital, was the land of the Yadavas. It was a kind of republican confederacy with Ugrasena as king, though it was really, a courtesy title. The Andhakas were the biggest clan and Vasudeva, their feudatory.

When Kamsa realised exactly what Narada Muni had said, he recalled that this was the day that Devaki, just married, would leave for her new home. He shouted out orders for his chariot and his guards. The chariot, the guards, soldiers on foot and horsemen thundered towards Devaka's palace.

The palace was covered with flowers and green leaves, music played from some hidden balcony, and women were singing the farewell songs to the bride.

King Ugrasena's chariot was there, Yadavas of every clan were present and conch shells were being blown. Kamsa's chariot thundered up, his soldiers surrounding him, and everything was stricken into silence.

Gaily decorated bullocks were yoked to the cart waiting to take the bride home. Devaki had already been helped into her chariot.

Kamsa approached the bride's chariot and, catching Devaki by her hair, pulled her out and down on to the ground, still damp with scented water and thickly strewn with flower petals and rice thrown by those blessing her, wishing her a loving home and happiness.

Devaki screamed, her be-jewelled fingers clutched at Kamsa's harsh hands in her hair. Ugrasena and Devaka, the Yadavas, Vasudeva and his friends, were, for a moment, frozen into immobility and silence.

Then Vasudeva, knowing Kamsa's violent temper, moved forward to ask what had happened, to cause this anger against his cousin. What had he or Devaki done to make him so very angry? "She is your cousin, your sister, a helpless girl, just married. What is the cause of your anger? Put down your sword, Prince."

"Get out of my way," Kamsa replied, pushing aside his uncle, Devaka. "I am going to kill her."

"But, Prince, why?" begged Vasudeva.

"I have been warned, warned by the gods, warned by Narada Muni. Warned that Devaki's eighth child will kill me. Well, I shall kill *her*. If I kill Devaki then there will be no eighth child of hers to threaten me."

Vasudeva knew that Kamsa's temper and cruelty were so terrible that not one person among all the Yadavas present, would do anything to help him or Devaki.

"But, it is her eighth child who is the danger, Prince, this poor girl is no threat to you. Please let her go. I promise that as each child is born I will bring it to you. And then you can prevent the prophecy from being fulfilled."

Kamsa looked around—the Yadavas were angry, his father worried, his uncle, Devaka, bewildered and angry. The time was not right. He let Devaki fall from his clutching hands.

"She can live, but you and she will live in one of my palaces. You will be under vigilance all the time. And remember, Vasudeva, I will hold you to your promise. Every child of Devaki's will be given to me." And to himself he added, "And I shall not let a single child of her's live. No child of Devaki's is going to threaten me."

The once-happy bridal procession turned towards Kamsa's Gajaraja palace. The music had stopped, the flowers withered and Devaki and Vasudeva became Kamsa's prisoners. It was the eighth child that was the danger, and not till Devaki had

had eight children, would there be any hope of release.

What choice had Devaki and Vasudeva? As long as the eighth child was not born Vasudeva, the chief of the Shoora clan, must face the fact that his clan was without their leader.

Devaki, so young, so very lovely, was taken away from sunlight and freedom to a dark and closely-guarded room. And there she lived with her husband.

When she was due to have her first child, and the time of birth approached, the number of guards was increased. Soon after the birth of his first child, which was a boy, Vasudeva took the baby to Kamsa, who had come to the prison-palace on hearing the news. Kamsa wrenched the child out of his father's arms and threw the small child down, hard, upon the ground.

"But he was innocent, innocent!" cried Vasudeva.

"I am taking no chances."

Years went by, and each time it was the same. Every time a child was born to Devaki, the child was killed by Kamsa.

"Why should I have any more children when he kills them all?" wept Devaki. "I cannot bear it, I cannot bear it."

"It is your eighth child that will be the deliverer," replied Vasudeva. "What choice is there? And, Devaki, you, maybe you, will be the mother of the deliverer, the incarnation of God's love."

Outside the palace-prison walls the Yadavas were being mercilessly battered into submission. Those who spoke of ethics and morals, who talked of law or dharma, were driven away. The sages and holy men were unwelcome in Kamsa's court.

Each time a new-born child of Devaki's was killed the whis-pers increased.

Kamsa's spies were everywhere. All around there were different kinds of punishment, imprisonment and confiscation

of land and property. Men who worked conscientiously, or spoke words of sane advice, were driven out. Many Yadavas moved away from Kamsa's country, while everywhere the prayers were, "Deliverer, come. Our hearts long for you. This adharma cannot continue. When will the deliverer come?"

Outside the prison walls the whisper went round and round: "Let us not lose faith. The deliverer is about to be born. Earth cannot bear the weight of such cruelty. Kamsa will not be able to kill every child of Devaki's—not the eighth child. The eighth shall be the deliverer. Let us wait, let us dry our tears and be as patient as our mother—the Earth."

But Kamsa was not patient; the prophecy was a living nightmare for him. He had killed six of Devaki's new-born children and the seventh was due.

The days went by. Devaki had a still-born child, a girl, but the whisper went round that she had given birth, by forcible abortion, to a son before time, and that the child had been smuggled away by Rohini, Vasudeva's first wife. The child and Rohini were living in Gokula with Vasudeva's clansman and feudatory, Nanda.

When Devaki was pregnant with her eighth child Kamsa had Devaki's guards increased and she was moved into a dark dungeon. No one was allowed to visit her except the old priest, Gargacharya. Devaki's eighth pregnancy had brought a special glow into her face. She looked as if there was a light within her. Her every breath had become a prayer.

It was the eighth night of the waning moon in the month of Bhadra. A terrible storm darkened the sky, thunder crashed, lightning cracked whips of fire through the dark clouds. The rain was torrential. People shut their doors firmly against the storm. Its sound battered the ears—no other sound could be heard.

It was midnight, and Devaki was helped by Vasudeva as

she gave birth to her eighth child. There was no midwife to help as the terrible storm and floods had prevented her from leaving her house.

Vasudeva placed the baby in a basket left behind by the old priest and crept to the door. It was open. The soldiers were asleep in the guard room and had shut their door against the shattering impact of the storm. The way to the river lay open before Vasudeva.

The popular story is that it was a miracle that the guards slept while Vasudeva smuggled the baby Krishna to Gokula. Practically every Indian is familiar with the picture of storm and rain, dark clouds and lightning, and Vasudeva carrying the infant Krishna in a basket, with the serpent, Ananta, protecting him.

Vishnu is the power that protects. He is love, and love is a protecting force. Love is also precious and so has to be protected. Krishna is total manifestation of love in absolute perfection. To depict the purity of perfection, the Hindu imagination chose Krishna to be portrayed as a new-born child being protected from the elemental storm.

In the Krishna legend, this love has all the variety of meaning the human mind and heart need and want: love of God and God's love for all that is created. The conception is on so vast a scale that the human mind, in India, captured it in an infant. There are paintings of the infant Krishna lying on the heart-shaped peepul leaf; the baby Krishna, being put in a cradle; the infant Krishna lying in a basket waving his small hands or playing with his tiny fingers.

Vasudeva crossed the river, Yamuna, which was in flood, but nothing harmed the baby. Both Vasudeva and the child in the basket were safe. As he reached the other side, which

was Gokul, he found Gargacharya waiting with Nanda.

“Take the child, Nanda, take care of him. Bring him up as your own. But have you one to give me in his place?”

“Yes, my chief. Take this infant girl. Hurry, go back.”

Vasudeva hurried back to Mathura, to the prison and to Devaki, waiting anxiously for him.

“Oh, surely Kamsa will not kill this child. It is a girl, how can she hurt him?”

Nanda took Vasudeva and Devaki's new-born son and put him in the cradle where his new-born daughter had been put earlier in the day. His wife, Yashoda, had had so difficult a delivery that she had not yet seen her child.

The storm rose in fury, the wind shrieked around Kamsa's palace, where he slept an uneasy sleep. And then Kamsa had a dream. He dreamt that he saw Vishnu of the four arms, with his blazing head-dress that towered in a pyramidal cone above that beautiful face with its heart-stopping smile—a totally enigmatic smile, for who knows what it means? Then the dream changed and Kamsa saw a slender young man, with a strange blue tint in the colour of his skin, looking at him and smiling the same smile. And then suddenly, everything changed, the eyes blazed and a flame-gold discus came whirling at him and cut off his head.

Horror-struck, Kamsa saw himself in his dream as a headless corpse while his decapitated head lay on the ground and glared back at him.

With a gurgled gasp, Kamsa awoke. All around him was the sound of the terrible storm. A window had burst open and someone was trying to shut it.

In the morning, news came to Kamsa that Devaki had given birth to her eighth child.

“My doom, is it? I shall see what god, or whoever it is, can frighten me any more with all these stories. My doom,

I shall be *yours*."

Devaki would not part with this baby. She would not give it to Vasudeva and held her in her arms, close to herself, hugging her.

"No, not this child; she is only a girl, how can she harm you?"

Kamsa said, "Your eighth child is to be my doom and now I shall put an end to all this."

As he reached out to pull the child from Devaki's arms, Vasudeva joined his hands together, palm to palm, in a prayerful gesture, and pleaded, in a broken voice, to spare this child.

"This is a girl. It was a boy who was to be your destroyer. This is a girl, what harm can she do you? Be merciful, Prince. Do not smear yourself with the terrible sin of killing a girl-child, and that too, your own sister's. Do not do it, Prince, spare her."

Kamsa caught the baby by her legs and as he whirled the child up to dash her down, she shrieked, and voices spoke within him. He saw visions, all in the few seconds of the child's scream, the voices within his conscience spoke, and as his traumas increased, his innermost thoughts shrieked his own doom: "A girl, a daughter, a visual manifestation of the Great Goddess—Maha Maya, the Creatrix." He saw the face of a beautiful woman dressed in gorgeous clothes and jewels—a goddess or a bride.

Kamsa staggered back, while the child still screamed and wailed. Then he lowered her and put her in Vasudeva's arms saying, "Take her. Take her out of my sight. And go, go—away from here, go where you please, but go. Get out of my sight, let me be free of all this."

Kamsa left, and Vasudeva and Devaki were released, but still the whispers went round: "And Kamsa flung the girl down

on the stone but she rose to the heavens. She was Maha Maya, the Great Goddess. He is doomed, his destroyer lives, our deliverer is born.'

Through time and several centuries, this legend is today, part of a people's myths, and an integral part of the story told in villages, towns and cities, by tellers-of-tales and grandmothers.

Once upon a time, a long time ago, in the forest-hermitage at Naimisa, the sadhus asked Sauti to tell them the story of Krishna: "It will cleanse our minds of trivial thoughts and our hearts will overflow with love for Lord Krishna."

They asked to know why Krishna was born on earth, who was Vasudeva and who was Devaki? Why did he live in Nanda's house and why was Krishna, who was the lord of the heavens, afraid of Kamsaa? Who were the gopa and gopis? And Radha—who was Radha? Was she not Narayani, the constant companion of the Lord? Yet they separated. Why? Kamsa is killed but how. . . the sages at Naimisa wanted answers.

Today we, too, want answers, even though Krishna is a name known everywhere. Within the legends and myths there are answers to these questions but to dig too deep, and turn everything inside out, does take away some of the poetry that lives within a legend; and legends and myths are the heart of a people.

Sauti, memoriser of legends and myths, the re-teller of tales of long ago to the sadhus, tells them the Krishna legend as he had heard and memorised it from Veda Vyasa—the greatest rishi.

Sauti repeated Muni Narada's praise of Krishna: 'Wherever, whenever men and people think of the story of Krishna, the gods come to listen, a little of evil dies, and thought spreads its influence.'

Thought spreads its influence by waves of energy being released in the subtlest regions surrounding man. One cannot see thought, but sensitive people can always feel the weight of ugly thoughts. Therefore, it stands to reason that, when a concourse of people sit down to listen to stories of good and right acts which, in the long run, prove to be superior to bad actions, their own thoughts surround them with an aura of calm and right thinking, or godly thinking.

For, after all, what are these innumerable gods of the Hindus except their own inner powers for good and right, for compassion, humanism and love. These are the gods.

The anti-gods, the asuras, the evil ones, are those powers of thought and action which are outward looking, possessive, covetous, pressurising, domineering and powerful. They are unheeding, selfish, and all that does not contribute to the evolution of man into becoming, and being, like the gods, which means being life-supporting, therefore powerful, compassionate and loving; a humane human and a happy man.

Krishna was born that Man. He was not a demi-god or a petty god. He was that perfection. Krishna was born a complete and perfect human. Krishna was born when the powers of evil thinking and action were dominating India. All the power of love—that quality which is totally life-supporting—was missing. Krishna was born to a woman, and a mother, agonizing for a little kindness, mercy, pity, love. Krishna was born to give out all those basic qualities.

If Krishna is called God it is because he represents all those qualities which are valued by the mind.

Sauti began to tell his listeners tales from the Puranas. Tales of Krishna-Narayana and why he came on earth as Krishna, son of Vasudeva.

One day, Devi Narayani's companions came and told her

that a heavenly woman called Viraja had come to visit Narayana. Devi-Narayani went to see for herself if this was true but when she tried to enter Narayana's beautiful pavilion in Golaka, the highest heaven, his great devotee and guard, Sridama, would not let her enter, until he got permission from Narayana.

Later, when Narayana came to see Devi, she would have nothing to do with him, she would not let him take her into his arms and turned her face away: "You are just like men on earth. And if you must behave like them go down to earth and be like them. Then you can have a thousand Virajas." And the Devi sent him away.

Sridama, who was devoted to Narayana, tried to reason with her and also told her that, she ought to remember, Narayana was not only the Lord of everything but he was also the creator of womankind. "You have no right to speak to him in this manner," Sridama said.

This enraged the Devi to such a pitch that she cursed Sridama: "You dare criticise me, I, who am Narayani. For this, be born on earth as an asura!"

Deeply hurt that the Devi should be so unjust to him, he laid a counter-curse on her and said: "Be born on earth as a woman." Then he went on to say that she would be born in the home of cow-herds and though she would meet and love Narayana, she would spend her life apart from him. "And for a hundred years you will not see your beloved."

Weeping, the Devi went to find Narayana to tell him about Sridama's terrible curse. "How shall I live without you, my love," she wept.

Viraja had heard Narayani's raised voice when she was in the pavilion with Narayana. Terrified, she was stricken into immobility; then, slowly, her eyes filled with tears. Those lovely eyes, like the buds of the water-lily, were drowned with

tears. Her very eyes became tears, then slowly the lovely body, with rounded breasts like honey-filled jars, with a waist that could be spanned by two hands, melted.

Melting, Viraja became a river—a river in the heavens on whose banks yogis sat in yoga; and sadhus and sanyasis chanted mantras, saying, ‘neither hunger nor thirst is known to those who drink these waters.’

Krishna-Narayana had vanished as soon as he heard the Devi’s voice speaking to Sridama. Later when he returned, there was no Viraja, only the river. He cried: “What has happened to you, my lovely one, return to me, come to me once again.”

The river took form and this time Viraja, as she came, she was Radha . . . Radhika of the beautiful glinting eyes dressed in a sari the colour of *pitamber*-yellow. It was the colour of golden sunlight, the colour of Krishna’s garments.

And, once again, Viraja was Krishna-Narayana’s love.

Sauti continued with the Puranic story, saying that after some time had passed, Viraja became pregnant. And she remained pregnant for a hundred years and then gave birth to seven sons.

One day, when she was in Narayana’s arms her children grew impatient of waiting, and called out to her. Viraja got up and took her children in her lap but Narayana was furious at the interruption and cursed the sons: “You shall become the seven seas and your waters shall be so salty, that no one shall drink them.”

Torn with anguish, Viraja wept and cried for her children but Krishna spoke loving words and, telling her the future, consoled her by saying: “Do not weep, my love, I shall never leave you. Every day I shall be found on your banks.”

And Viraja once again became a river with water like drops of dew.

This river is all rivers, and also, the river of love, faith and devotion.

The story of Viraja and Krishna-Narayana is a myth and legend which carries within it an enormous potential of meanings. Here, Narayana is the Creative Intelligence, the Absolute wholeness of Intelligence in a creative phase. The Intelligence created rivers, rivers created oceans and seas. The minerals brought down by rivers, or Viraja's tears, made the sea saline. And the river in heaven, is the river of eternal unending Time.

Krishna-Narayana and Devi-Narayani-Radha are Intelligence and Energy held within each other, and are a basic entity, sometimes together, and sometimes apart. It is this being apart which is Maya, and is called both Krishna-Lila and Devi-Lila. It seems true that Energy and Intelligence are apart, but how can they be, since without Cosmic Intelligence nothing moves, yet Cosmic Intelligence itself does not move, for who will move what, and from where to where?

There is pure silence when Cosmic Intelligence is quiet in just being but, when that Intelligence creates, that silence becomes sound, or there is movement. The creative aspect of Cosmic Intelligence is Krishna having affairs of love with Radha-Viraja, or with the Gopis.

Gopi is a word-game of Sanskrit semantics and grammar. Gopis are the senses, the nature of a person, the natural tendencies within each human, which is purified and filled with love as it turns towards Love Incarnate and away from the ugliness of possessive thoughts.

In the *Gita Govinda*—the devotional poem written by Jayadeva—the Gopis, called the companions or Sakhis, are happiest when Radha and Krishna are together. Love, then, is complete.

There is the silence of wholeness within a human, when

there is meditation which leads to the Source. The unending gaze of Radha and Krishna is a depiction of this. A Hindi poet has written:

Radha stands and looks at Krishna

Krishna gazes back at her.

Whom shall I call the moon, whom the *chakor*. . .

The bird which looks and looks only at the moon.

When the *chakor* gazes, the eyes cling unmoving,

But as the moon moves, the neck twists,

And twisting breaks, and lies broken on the floor.

Whom shall I call the moon, whom the *chakor*

Sauti continued the story:

During this time Prithvi, the Earth-goddess, came to Brahma with her eyes brimming with tears, imploring him to help her. She said she knew he had told her to look after the children of his creation. She had lovingly and faithfully obeyed his commands: "But look what I have to bear today—people have no faith, no humility, no love in their hearts. They talk against religion and dharma. They argue against the laws of the people. For them only today matters. Brahmins have no learning, and learning is without the sanctity of faith. They are harsh and cruel in speech and thought; and parents are not treated with love and kindness. Even their hearts are unclean. I cannot bear such evils any more. You must come to my aid, I need your help." And Prithvi, the Earth-goddess, wept.

Seeing her weep the gods gathered around and then, led by Brahma, they went to Krishna-Narayana, Sri Hari, where he lived in Golaka, in the uppermost reaches of heaven.

Sauti said: "Who can describe the beauty of Golaka! The breeze is always cool and scented, everywhere green leaves

are wreathed round columns of glimmering stone, incense and sandalwood scent the air, the rarest of flowers are everywhere. It is the place from where speech returns, and falls silent.

Narayana asked why the gods had come. Brahma told him Prithvi's story. Earth, weeping, with her hair dishevelled, fell at his feet and wept: "Help me. You are our only help, you are Love Incarnate, help me."

He said those who are devoted to him need never fear, for their sorrows would end. He would think of the best means to help Prithvi.

But remember I am in all actions, in all that happens.

Time is the giant that lifts up or destroys.

Time is the agent that hands over the result of actions.

Time is that in which man and his actions sprout like new-planted grain.

Time proves the words of the Vedas.

Time is the master of those who govern and those governed. Man is not the most powerful, however powerful he might be. Time is the final answerer.

And, remember, that I live in fire and in clouds and thunder, in rains and famine.

The sun and moon and stars move within their law and rules as I have laid down.

Everything disappears and is annihilated by Time but I am the master of Time.

Be comforted, Prithvi, I shall be the means.

He said, "Yes, the time has come." The weight of purity must balance the weight of impurity weighing down the earth."

Then he told the gods to hurry and be born on earth. All those who loved him must be born on earth, to support the infant Love when it was born, and be its support and

companions.

The sadhus wailed, "How shall we live in heaven without you?"

He told them to hurry and not waste time. They must go and be born on earth. Since Sridama had already been cursed, he must hurry to earth and be born as the asura, Sankhya-chuda, and with him must go Tulsi, who would eventually be his wife. And Narayani would have to go to earth and be born in the house of Vrikbhama, the cowherd.

Sauti continued the story, by telling his listeners in the forest-hermitage, how Narayana had spoken to the Devi, telling her not to be distressed.

They would not be parted for very long, he told her, and that, in Vrindavana and Gokula, which was in the country called Vraj, the love of Radha and Krishna would live on as long as man's memory lasted. There, they would meet again, there they would laugh and play again, there, the companions, the Sakhis, would sing and the dance would be a living reality. She was not to grieve and, in any case, Sridama's word could not be changed. His curse stands—Devi Narayani must go and be born in Vraj, and live in the home of a cowherd—a breeder and herder of cattle.

The Devi wept, how would she live without him, it was not possible for her to exist without her loved one.

But he said, "You and I are one. We are never apart. Do not distress yourself. We shall soon be together in Vraj. Go now and be born in the womb of Vaidarbhi, Vrikbhama's wife."

Then he turned to Parvati, the daughter of the Himalayas and Shiva's beloved, and told her to go down to earth and be born as Mahamaya to Devaki. "Kamsa will try to kill you but he will not succeed, and you will meet your beloved Shiva again as your husband, in Durvasa Muni. The world will say the child died and rose as Mahamaya to the heavens, but

your heaven shall be the earth, and your story shall be remembered forever, for you shall have saved the earth from her weight of evil, and I shall follow soon after, to remove the evils which have made the goddess Prithvi weep."

Sauti went on with the story, how Narayana told Kartikeya, the chief warrior and leader of the gods, to take birth in Jambuvati's womb and, in this manner, all the gods were told where each was to be born, who was to go where, and what their names would be in their earthly form.

He told Devi exactly what would happen in the future and though, eventually, she would not see him for a hundred years at first they would be together.

Devi Narayani said, "But by the fact of birth as a human on earth, my purity shall be impaired."

Narayana answered her by saying, "Do not be grieved, Devi, your purity shall not be impaired. Just as a caterpillar moves from one blade of grass to another, so the earth-bound souls move from one birth to another. When, at the end of a series of actions, and their results, the body fails, the spirit moves away. Again, due to a series of actions, and their past results, and its own desires, bound within the essence of its spirit, it takes another birth. It chooses its womb by being caught at the moment of conception by its own desire for birth within that particular womb.

"The passion of the conceiving couple and the desire of a soul wanting birth is commingled, and therefore, the new about-to-be-born spirit is enveloped by the love, passion, or lust, of the about-to-be parents.

"Devi, you have no past human desires, no actions and results. You cannot, therefore, be enveloped by your 'karma'. You cannot be tainted—your purity remains unimpaired. Go gently into Vaidarbhi's womb and be born as Vrikbhamā's daughter.

"I, too, shall be born, but I shall come at the moment of birth as my full self (*Purna Para Brahma Sri Krishna*). The first breath of the child will be mine."

Sauti went on to say that Narayana then commanded Ananta the thousand-hooded serpent that slides as Eternity through Time, or Kala, to take birth.

Then a strange instruction was given that, though he would be conceived in Devaki's womb, he would move to Rohini's womb and be known as Rohini's son.

Narayana said, "Ananta will go to Devaki as her seventh child. But Devaki is on earth to bear me. Ananta being Kala, and being inseparable from me, will have to leave Devaki's womb and move to Rohini's womb, because of her great desire to bear her husband's son. And the earthlings shall say Devaki's seventh child was premature and still-born.

"As eternity is the energy, strength and force, flowing within and beyond the limitation of Time, or Kala, Ananta would have, as one of his titles, the name of Sankarshan—The Forceful One. His other name would be Balarama."

The sadhus asked Sauti who Rohini was before her earthly birth as Rohini.

Sauti said, then listen to the story. Kashyapa Muni was famous in the days of long ago. His wives were beautiful and intelligent. Kudru was one of his thirteen wives but his primary wife was Aditi, who was outstandingly beautiful.

One evening when she had had her bath, she dressed and put on lovely jewels. Like a dew drop, a beautiful single pearl hung from her nose. Her armlets and bracelets glowed on her cream-gold arms. Her lips were as red as pomegranate seeds. A sensuous rapture enveloped her. She sent a messenger to ask her husband, Kashyapa Muni, to visit her, for she longed

for him in exquisite languor.

The messenger returned to say that the Muni was visiting his wife Kudru and would come after some time.

A jealous rage swept through Aditi. "I long for my husband and he delays, because he is with another wife. May my curses fall on her." She turned to the messenger and said, "Go, tell her may my curses fall on her. Tell her. may she be born on earth as an ordinary mortal. And may my thwarted desire be her fate. She will be separated from her husband, long for him and never see him."

The terrified messenger went to Kudru and repeated Aditi's words.

Kudru fell weeping into her husband's arms. She clung to him, terrified. "We shall be parted, my husband, what shall I do now?"

Kashyapa Muni told her not to grieve for he, too, would be born as an ordinary mortal, one day, at the same time. "And you and I shall be together."

Kashyapa Muni and Kudru became Vasudeva and Rohini. And Aditi came as Devaki.

The sadhus asked, who were Yashoda and Nanda in some past age and life that they should have been so blessed by Sri Krishna? Who was Yashoda that so great a fortune should have been her's? It must have been an awesome experience to have been known as the mother, and given the milk of her breasts to Krishna, Sri Hari, the Lord of the Universe.

Sauti said this is what he had heard from Veda Vyasa.

Once, long ago, a man called Drona, and his wife, prayed and did many penances to have a vision of Sri Krishna.

Years went by and their *tapas* continued. The months, the years and seasons changed, but they never lessened their hours of *tapas*, of prayer and meditation. Years and years went by and they were in constant meditation of the Lord.

And still they had no vision, no experience—Krishna did not appear.

Finally they said, what is the use of this living and breathing when the Lord is not to be seen. Let us destroy this body. They built a huge pyre of wood, set it alight, and crying out, "Krishna," they were about to throw themselves into the fire, when a voice came from the heavens" "You will not see Krishna in this life but in another future life he will come to you as your son. Give up this thought of destroying yourself. Live and be happy."

That Drona and his wife are Nanda and Yashoda.

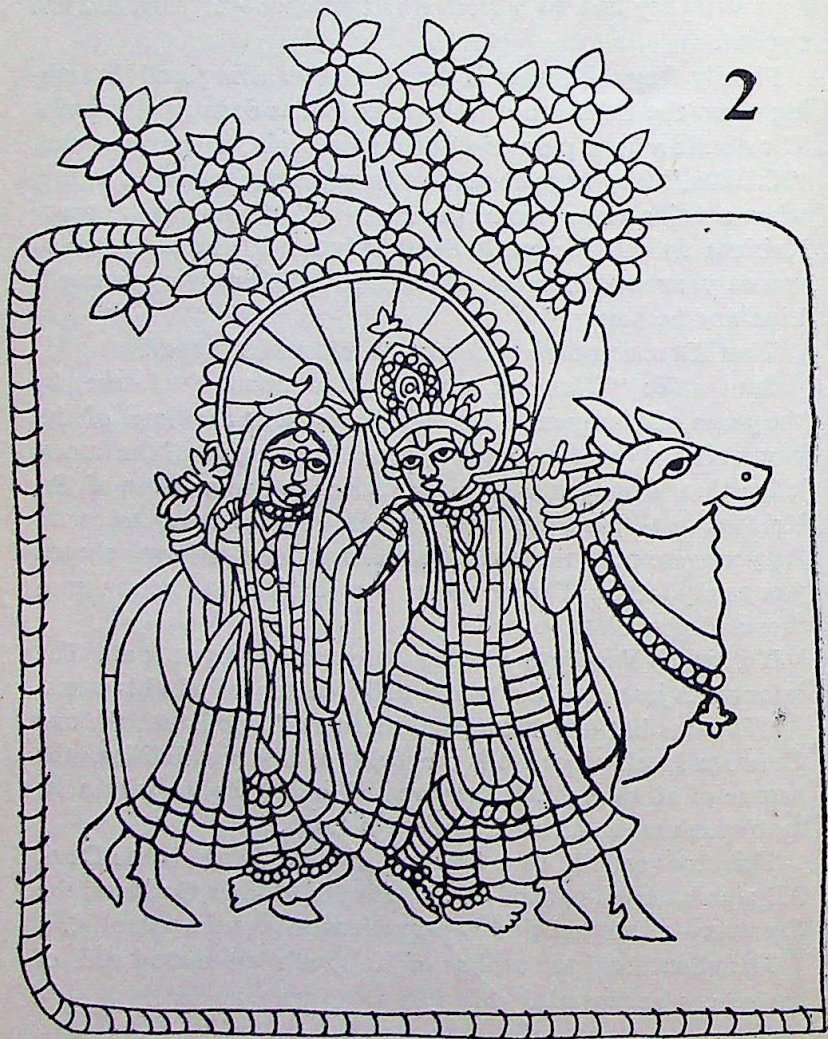
Sauti said: "Whatever might be told about the future, by the grace of Narayana, mortals forget it at the time of its happening. Who could have borne the weight of the knowledge that Vasudeva was given, when he had a vision of Sri Krishna in all his glory and he said, 'I am coming to earth. As you were once the first and primal Man, I have chosen you as my father. The primal woman, Aditi, is to be my mother and give birth to me.'

Yet, when Vasudeva saw his little son he forgot it all. The infant was just his child whom he lifted tenderly in his arms.

"There is but one Narayana, listeners," said Sauti, the one Creative Intelligence. It is the field of all possibilities, the source of all thought. Every created object holds within it, that which we call, Sri Krishna, the Lord.

This movement, this flow of life and living, is the Devi. All women are a part of her. She is the Mother Goddess, the Creatrix—all womankind is her reflection and the potential.

Then Sauti told the sadhus of Krishna's childhood and of the games he played.



*I*n Gokula, on the other side of the river to Mathura where Kamsa lived, Yashoda, Nanda's wife woke up from exhausted sleep after the birth of her child.

The rain had stopped and in the golden light of early morning, the earth seemed dressed in a yellow garment.

"The child, where is the child?" she said in a tired voice. Someone put the child beside her, telling her it was a son.

Yashoda's heart seemed to grow larger and flooded her with happiness, tears rose in her eyes, and as she looked at her child in tenderness, her milk began to fill her breasts. Yashoda's joy in her child was doubly strong, for this was her first child, and she and Nanda had been married for a long time.

The clan members were happy that tradition would be maintained and that, at long last, a future head of the clan

had been born in the house of Nanda.

The women, like all groups of women in India, were thrilled to know about the new baby, and that, too, a son. Soon there was a stream of people going towards Nanda's house. The girls were singing, dancing, clapping their hands. With shining brass jars full of milk, the women of the cattle rearers walked in procession, singing traditional songs, welcoming the arrival of a child. Conch shells blared the happy news and bells began to ring from every home.

Gokula became a mass of colour, with the swing of women's swirling skirts moving from every house to Nanda's home. The streets were full of songs, the scent of the monsoon flowers moved with the cool breeze, and the peacocks danced in the green groves and orchards of Gokula.

Singing, dancing, the herders' women, the gopis, went round and round the courtyard. When the baby was brought out for a little while, they looked at him and spoke in a wondering tone.

"Look at him, he is not brown, or wheat-gold, or dark, like our children. He is blue. His is the colour of new-grown monsoon grass reflected in the clouds."

"Look at his eyes, they are shaped like lotus buds. They are huge."

"Oh see, he is looking at us. He is smiling. What a lovely baby."

Yashoda crooned over her son, "Ah but there never was a baby as beautiful as you, my son." Weak and spent after a difficult birth she whispered a song from her heart.

I will put collyrium-kajal round your eyes, my loved one,
I shall put peacock feathers in your hair.

I will dress you in yellow silk garments and put chains of
gold round your waist,

I will put pearls round your neck, my loved one,
And silver bells on your feet.
You dance on my heart, my loved one,
You are my love, my only love.
We will call you Ghanashyama,
You are our Bala Gopala, my loved one.

And Yashoda rocked her son in his cradle as Hindu women through the centuries have continued to rock him on the day of Janamashtami, the day of Krishna's birth.

Customs and traditions are carried on in sometimes, an extraordinary fashion in India.

At Janamashtami, in the villages deep in the hills of Kumaon and right into Nepal, the custom is to put a cucumber in the cradle to represent the infant Krishna.

It is startling, because this cucumber symbol is used in a very ancient Samhita mantra which says: Triambak, the Three eyed, the One Lord, the scent of your grace is spread all around and nourishes our faith. Worshipping, may we be snapped from the stalk (of life) by Death as a cucumber snaps from its holding stalk. May we never be separated from immortality.

And through all these innumerable centuries the symbol of such a simple banal object, an everyday object in villages, and homes, is used to depict so vast and magnificent a prayer, and a conception of life, death and immortality.

It is extraordinary to watch with what reverence an untutored, illiterate woman places an absurd cucumber in a cloth, slung as a hammock and a cradle, for the new-born Krishna.

The days went by with Krishna crowing and gurgling in Yashoda's arms, while Nanda and Yashoda adored their baby and were wrapped and blanketed with joy.

In Mathura, Kamsa brooded over the unforgotten prophecy.. His spies brought news that, in Gokula, Nanda had a son—a strange baby who looked into people's eyes and stole their hearts with his beautiful smile.

Vasudeva's first wife, Rohini, had been allowed by Kamsa to sometimes meet her husband. Then, one day, she had fled to Nanda in Gokula. And now Rohini had a boy, a baby larger than a child of that age should be.

Kamsa's spies reported rumours and whispers. The whispers said Vasudeva's eighth child had been a boy and he had exchanged his child with Nanda's daughter. That was the girl Kamsa had spared. She was not Devaki's daughter, she had been Nanda's. And that large baby of Rohini's, that was Devaki's. There had been no still-born child.

The people were whispering, "It is all the Lord's maya—Devaki's seventh son fled to Rohini's womb. Conceived in Devaki's womb, born of Rohini, he is Ananta, who is Eternity—the Lord's support. Together the two boys will destroy Kamsa."

The whispers reported by Kamsa's spies brought a rush of blood to Kamsa's head. Something had to be done. He could not attack Gokula and annihilate the whole of Nanda's clan. It would lead to too much trouble with all the other Yadava tribes. But he could do one thing, and that is destroy Nanda's child. This would put an end to the whispers, and end his own fears. The problem was how to set about it. Whom to send as the assassin, and how was Nanda's son to be killed?

Then Kamsa had a brilliant idea. So simple and so easy, he thought. So he sent for his sister, Putana, and told her his fears, ideas and plans.

"Do this for me, Sister, and you may have whatever you want." Putana laughed and went to dress to go to Gokula.

Putana was a handsome woman, large and luscious. Her

big breasts pushed against the confines of her choli-blouse. She dressed to go visiting the head of a clan. Her skirts of heavy brocade fell swirling against the bells of her silver anklets. Necklaces and chains of gold went round her neck. She put a veil embroidered with golden thread over her head. Then she undid her blouse and painted the nipples of her breasts with deadly poison. As she hooked up her blouse and walked on her way to Gokula the very earth seemed to shudder in horror.

At the river crossing, the ferryman wondered who she was. "She is so very handsome but I have never seen her before. Who is this cowherder's woman?"

Putana looked at the beauty of Gokula where sleek cows grazed the lush grass and plump calves kicked up their heels, running madly all round, in sheer high spirits. Everything was green and creepers, laden with blossoms, wrapped clasping tendrils round every home.

Putana saw there was prosperity in Gokula. Every gopa and gopi wore gold in a chain, or as bracelets. All the houses were neat and decorated with paintings on the outer walls. As she passed by, everyone in Gokula wondered, "Who is this stranger, where has she come from?"

One house was bigger, more decorated, with its columns and wooden house posts decorated with garlands of flowers and green leaves. Putana guessed that this must be Nanda's house. The women and men were moving about, busy, each with his own work. Some looked up, wondering who Putana might be.

One came up to her. "Who are you looking for, lady? And what can we do for you?" Silently they all thought, is she one of us? She is beautiful but strange. Perhaps she is a sorceress or a witch in dazzling disguise.

Putana said she lived in Mathura and was the daughter of

a brahmin. She had come to attend the celebrations in Gokula, as she had heard that Nanda's wife had had a baby, and a son. She had come to visit and see the child.

"After I have blessed the child, I shall be going back. Now bring the child and show him to me." And she smiled.

Yashoda was thrilled to hear that a brahmin woman had come all the way from Mathura, to see her little son and bless him. She hurried away, brought the baby and put him in Putana's lap.

A strange tremor went through Putana as Krishna's body touched her. She stroked the child and kissed him all over his little body. Again and again she kissed him, and then, unhooking her blouse, she thrust the nipple of her breast in Krishna's mouth.

As the nipple entered the mouth and the lips closed to suck, Putana felt her limbs turn to water, and she fell lifeless from the stool on which she was sitting.

As Putana fell on to the floor, the baby fell, too, and yelled. Yashoda hurriedly picked him up and when she and the gopis turned towards Putana, they realised she was dead.

Yashoda felt this was something of dreadful ill omen. It might harm her child. "Call the priests, call the brahmins to chant mantras for peace to any angry element. Let us repeat prayers, let us do puja."

Nanda had Putana cremated on the banks of the Yamuna, and wondered who she could have been, and what had happened. Why did she die in this strange and sudden way?

Kamsa got the news through his spies and trembled with superstitious fear.

At Naimisa, the forest ashram, the sadhus listening to the story asked Sauti the same questions that Nanda had asked himself—why did Putana die as she did, what was the

secret inner meaning? There must be an explanation.

Sauti reminded the sadhus of the various avatars of Vishnu. When it was time for the Third Avatara, the Boar or Varaha avatara appeared. The universe was then all fluid, all water. Narayana thought to himself and plunged into the waters and then appeared out of the water, huge, powerful, the Varaha avatara holding Prithvi, the Earth, on the tip of his tusks, after he had dug her out from beneath those waters.

But why was Prithvi below the waters, and why was the avatara in the shape of the Boar, the sadhus asked, and wanted to be told the story by Sauti.

Sauti said: there was once an asura named Hiranyaksa who did *tapas*, many penances, and prayed with great devotion to Brahma. Years went by and still the asura would not give up his *tapas*. Eventually Brahma appeared before him and offered him a boon.

Hiranyaksa asked that no god, man or beast injure him and he named the beasts—all beasts except the boar.

The boar is a lowly animal which digs up anything and everything, even if it is buried deep inside holes. As he digs the earth with his tusks, he turns over the surface matter to reveal that which is hidden. Whether the surface is soft as mud, or under water, or is rock-hard soil, the boar digs up that which he requires. That is why the avatara was a boar.

As time passed and his powers grew, Hiranyaksa became violent and arrogant. He grew more and more cruel to both gods and men. He stole the Vedas from Brahma and plunged down under the waters holding Prithvi, the Earth, in his arms. All was dark and fluid, and Prithvi was captive under the water.

Narayana breathed in sleep upon the primal waters but Brahma's night was over, so, when he opened his eyes and saw neither the Vedas nor Prithvi, he prayed to Narayana and

woke him with his prayers.

Narayana then assumed the form of the Varaha, and saved Prithvi from deep underneath the waters, where she was held by Hiranyaksa.

As he rose from the waters the gods chanted:

Who is this who rises radiant as the sun,

Vast as a mountain, roaring like thunder.

Great is his strength and his limbs smooth as the trunk of a banana tree.

O Keshava, Lord of the Cosmic Concourse,

Hari, You are the form of a Boar.

Victory to you, our eternal refuge,

Jaya Jagadish Hare.

Sauti then told the sadhus. the story of the next avatara, who came to destroy Hiranyaksa's brother for his cruelties, and to once again bring back an equitable balance in Nature and in the nature of Man.

Hiranyaksa's brother, Hiranya-kasipu began *tapas* to please Brahma and obtain a boon. Like his brother he, too, spent years and years in fearful penance, prayers, chants, till eventually Brahma appeared to grant him a boon.

And this time Hiranya-kasipu, remembering his brother's fate, was very careful. He asked to be safe from gods, men and all beasts; that he not be killed indoors or outdoors; neither on earth nor in the skies; neither during the day nor during the night, or by any weapons.

Pleased with Hiranya-kasipu's prayers and chants, Brahma granted him the boons he asked for.

Hiranya-kasipu had a son, Prahalada who, as he grew older, prayed always to Vishnu. Displeased with his son for all this praying to any god, Hiranya-kasipu put him under the tutor-

ship of godless men and asuras. But Prahalada continued to pray only to Vishnu. Hiranya-kasipu put him in a room full of snakes to frighten him but the snakes slithered away while Prahalada prayed. Furiously angry, he one day ordered Prahalada to be crushed to death by his executioner elephant. As the elephant lumbered forward, with the tassles from his back cloth swinging and the bells hanging from it ringing out, Prahalada stood facing the elephant, with his hands joined together, praying to Vishnu. The elephant rushed forward and then stopped. He just touched Prahalada with his trunk, doing him no harm.

Sauti explained why. All evil is calmed by the power of purity in Sattva which, through the yoga of meditation, which uses the vehicle of sound, or the Name, takes the meditator to the source of all thinking, energy, power, till the field of all possibilities is reached.

The elephant stopped his rush when he felt the area of calm peace which surrounded Prahalada, as he stood in total yoga and oneness with Lord Vishnu. So, he touched Prahalada with his trunk, and did not harm him in any way.

Hiranya-kasipu saw what happened and was vexed, and unable to understand what had come over his fierce elephant. He stood at the entrance porch, overlooking the execution ground, and ordered Prahalada to be brought before him. Mocking him, he said, "Well, it is your Lord God who has saved you again, I suppose."

Prahalada told him the power of Vishnu overcame and balanced the weight of every evil.

"And where is this god of yours?"

Prahalada told him that not only was Vishnu everywhere, but there was nothing, and no place, where he was not present.

Hiranya-kasipu, laughing uproariously, strode up to a pil-

lar, and saying, "Then your god must be in this, too," kicked it.

There was a rumbling, roaring sound, the pillar cracked, crumbled and out of thunder and flaming light, a form took shape. It was neither man, nor god nor beast. The form had the head of a lion, the flaming aura of a god and the body of man. Its hands had long nails, like claws. The form reached out to Hiranya-kasipu and putting him on his knees, and holding him down across his thighs as he sat on the broken pillar, tore his stomach open and disentrained him. This was the Narasimha avatara.

The horrified Prahalada shut his eyes and prayed. Narasimha laughed and roared with blood dripping and entrails dangling from his hands.

Because of Brahma's boon, the place where he killed Hiranya-kasipu was neither indoors nor outdoors, it was an entrance porch. It was neither on earth nor in the skies, he killed him on his own knees. Nor was any weapon used. It was neither the hours of daylight or night, it was the evening hour of twilight—that brief moment before night pulls day into his arms.

Brahma's boon was not violated. Hiranya-kasipu's own arrogance was his destruction and his end.

Because of Brahma's boon that he would not be killed by any god, man or beast, Hiranya-kasipu's arrogance had risen to such towering proportions that he felt he was greater than any power, and that is why he objected to Prahalada praying to Vishnu. His attitude was that the gods, and Vishnu himself, was now powerless against him, and in his arrogance he mocked both Prahalada and the power of the Absolute. Kicking the pillar was his symbolic act of arrogance, and defiance and the bursting out of Narasimha from the pillar, is the symbolic answer to such arrogance.

The doing of *tapas* is *tapasya*, but *tapas* does not mean penance from the point of view of doing penance for some wrong done. *Tapas* means to produce an inward fire due to some mental or vocational activity. *Tapas* does not necessarily mean any special physical activity. By a kind of mental concentration, a great inward heat is produced in *tapas* and this heat is felt in subtler and subtler regions of thinking, or the mental energy process. The roar of inner mental energy-heat, if sufficiently pleasing, to whatever god on whom the person doing *tapas* is concentrating, compels that god to appear.

Tapas as such is neither bad nor evil. There are three kinds of *tapas*. The purest is that of the traditional hermit, where he lives and does *tapas* for its own sake, without having reward as a specific object.

Though in the Puranic stories, there are gods who appear before *risi*s and *muni*s, it is more because of their ardent devotion than violent *tapas*.

Devotion is possibly the most unselfish form of love. It is more love for the sake of love itself. It is this aspect of devotion, and love, which symbolises the tradition of devotion, *bhakti* and Krishna. And when the devotee offers his thoughts only to Krishna, Krishna promises in his turn to be always with his devotee.

This is an important aspect of the Krishna tradition.

The word *tapas* has different meanings and connotations. When it is used as a technique with self-inflicting suffering, in the form of certain physical yoga practices, to the utmost limit of intensity and time, and the word *tapas* is used about *asura* or anti-gods in the Puranas, then it means that these *asuras* are trying to conquer the powers of the universe itself.

Tapas of this demonic, or asuric kind represents ambition, selfishness and egotism on a horrific and gigantic scale.

Asuric *tapas* is condemned because it is done to gain power—and to use this power for self-aggrandizement.

It represents an expression of violent will power and a desire to develop the unlimited hidden energy that is stored in the unconscious vital part of human nature. Because of the nature of this type of *tapas*, it is considered by the Hindu tradition to be demonic, and therefore, we have all these stories of asuras and Hiranyaksa or Hiranya-kasipu.

The asuras are shown up in stories as practicing terrible austerities, to gain sufficient power to overthrow the gods and usurp their power. Brahma, the Creator, does bless these asuras, for even demonic power is part of the creative power but there is something, and some power, beyond man's material power. A power that man can share but cannot usurp with greed, anger, covetousness and arrogance.

This power is just and, if seen in correct perspective, is Love Incarnate.

It is to bring home this point that, in the Puranic stories, Indra and the gods go to Narayana and Narayana becomes an avatara in these stories. It is to bring up some basic point of ethics, morals, or the eternal verities of the Hindu tradition, that these delightful stories have been handed down through the centuries.

To illustrate absolute bhakti, or devotion and love, there is the story that, after Narasimha avatara had killed Hiranyakasipu, and Prahalada had chanted hymns and prayers to him, the Narasimha avatara offered him any boon he wanted. Prahalada answered that through an unknown succession of lives he had lived and desired countless things, now he had no desire, except to continue to love Vishnu. He said, that to ask is to desire and to ask for anything is a hindrance to the feeling of absolute love and devotion.

To test him, Narasimha offered endless wealth and the joys

of this world. Prahalada again refused everything. Eventually, Narasimha insisted that he ask for some boon.

Then Prahalada smiled and said, "If you insist that I ask for a boon, then give me this boon that never shall any desire be born in my heart and mind."

This story illustrates that, since Prahalada's heart was full of love of Vishnu, there was no room to desire anything else and, if he ever had any desire, from the blessing of the boon, then all that would be left in his heart was love for Vishnu.

The sadhus listened with great interest as Sauti told them, that after Hiranya-kasipu was killed, and the gods had lived in peace and happiness, ages went by and then Prahalada's grandson Bali, also known as Maha Bali, ruled the earth.

He was powerful, due to his prayers and *tapas*, but he began to deride the gods. He assumed he was the greatest power. In his arrogance, he boasted that the three worlds belonged to him—the three worlds of heaven, earth and Patala which is below the earth. He gave away great gifts and boasted he could even give the three worlds away, for everything was in his power.

Sauti said, the imbalance grew and once again an avatara was needed. This time the avatara came in the form of Vamana—a small dwarf Brahmin.

The sadhus said : tell us from the beginning, we wish to hear the full story of Vamana avatara.

Sauti said that Aditi, the mother of the gods, was sad and unhappy at the plight of her sons. One day she begged her husband, Kashyapa, to do something to help them but her husband told her he was helpless. "Only Vishnu can help you, lady. Pray to him and keep a twelve-day fast, drinking only milk during those twelve days." Aditi kept the fast and

constantly prayed to Vishnu. When Vishnu appeared before her, he told her that he was aware of the reason for which she had kept the fast and prayed to him.

Vishnu said, "It is no use anyone warring against Maha Bali at present. The time is not ripe, and therefore, the result will not be right, and the action will not be fruitful. However, I shall have to help since you have prayed so earnestly for my help. I shall lend a part of my being and I shall be born as your son. All will follow after that."

One day Maha Bali sat in his Prayer Hall, surrounded by his ministers, courtiers and priests doing the Asvamedha Yajna, the horse sacrifice, to establish his imperial status over the whole universe.

As the priests poured libations of ghee into the sacrificial fire, Bali felt as if some glowing presence had entered the Hall. He saw a small brahmin, a dwarf, a small mannikin, walk towards him dressed in deer skin, his only possession, the shell of a coconut washed up by the sea. He looked a boy but his eyes were calm and wise. His small body had smooth rounded limbs, as if made of golden butter. His brahminical sign, the yajnopavita, the sacred thread, lay smoothly white against his small chest.

Maha Bali got up from his throne as the little brahmin came in. Bali had a great respect for brahmins.

"And what alms may I gift my little brahmin?" he said, after he had offered the usual offerings of fruit, flowers and water to wash his feet.

Vamana said he had heard that Maha Bali would never refuse to give a gift to anybody, so he had come to ask for one.

"Ask for whatever you want, brahmin, Maha Bali will give it to you."

Vamana inclined his head; and said, all he wanted was what

he could cover in three paces, or three strides.

Shouting with laughter, Maha Bali put his hands on his hips and looked down at Vamana. "So small a gift? Certainly I shall gift it."

While Maha Bali was talking to the little brahmin, his Guru, Sukracharya, had been looking at Vamana. As soon as Maha Bali had made the promise, he went up closer to him and said that he suspected this was Vishnu, the great enemy of the anti-gods, Daityas, and Maha Bali.

"Unable to fight us in open battle, Vishnu has come in this disguise. Do not give him the three paces he asks for. Why, in one footstep of Vishnu the whole earth will be covered, and in the second and third, he will claim the heavens and whatever is above, or below the earth. Do not give him what he wants or, by your gift, you will be without your kingdom—you will have no place to rule."

Maha Bali said, having given his promise, he could not break his word, he could not tell a lie.

His Guru said, "This life is a tree, and truth is the blossoms and fruit on it, but if there is no tree, where is the question of fruit? If you give away everything you possess, you have dried up that tree of life. If you give your life away to Vishnu, of what use is truth to you? Gifts should be made with sensibility. One should not give disregarding the necessities of living. To tell a lie to save a life is not considered a crime."

But Bali continued to say, that, since he had given his word, he could not break it. He could give up his whole kingdom, but he could not face life with the verbal smear on his name, that Bali had broken his word.

His Guru was so exasperated and annoyed at Bali's insistence that his action was correct that, though Bali did not deserve it, for he was being entirely true to his word, his Guru cursed

him, saying, "You ignorant fool! You argue and think you know all the answers. You do not listen to the words of your Guru, you do not listen to his advice, for this you will soon lose all you possess—you will lose your kingdom."

Bali sighed, and continued with the rituals of giving a gift to a brahmin. His wife brought water in a jug of gold to pour on the brahmin's feet.

Maha Bali took some water in his hand and took the vow—"I give to the brahmin all he can cover by his three paces."

There was a roaring all about Maha Bali as Vamana grew, and grew; he took his first stride and his footstep covered the earth, and all those subtle regions that lie below and above it. Bali saw himself, all his people, his palaces, his possessions, within a tiny portion of that vast form.

Vamana took the second stride and covered the heavens, and again, the subtle regions below, above and within heaven were all his. Then Maha Bali heard a voice ask him, where he should take his third stride.

"The water of acceptance is in my hand, Maha Bali, where shall I take my third stride?"

Maha Bali had realised what he was facing, so he bowed his head, and asked for the third footstep to be put on his head.

And under the pressure of the third stride of Vamana, Maha Bali went down, down beyond the depths of Patala to Sutala. Because, in the end, he had bowed his head and asked for Vishnu's foot to be placed on it, he was granted a boon. He asked that once a year he be allowed to come out and see the sky, the earth and the people of his one-time kingdom.

"And because you never swerved from truth and your given word, your name shall be remembered."

Before Vamana had asked for his gift, as he walked up the hall and stood before Maha Bali, he was watched with either amusement or derision, but there was one person, in that great gathering of people in Maha Bali's court, who looked at Vamana with eyes of love.

Bali had a daughter named Ratnamala, and when she saw Vamana, she was enchanted by this little mannikin and she loved him as if he was her own little son. Silently she prayed to Vishnu, "Lord, give me a little son like this. Tell me how I can have a son like him. I shall kiss his little limbs, I shall kiss and fondle him in my lap. Life is not worth having, and it will be empty and pointless, unless I have a small one like this."

And, Narayana, understanding the overwhelming feeling of tenderness flooding Ratnamala, gave her a boon.

"I shall not be born your son, lovely girl, but I will grant you relief from the round of birth, the day I take your breast in my child mouth. In some future life this will happen when I lie in your lap."

Sauti said, Putana was this Ratnamala and this is why Putana lost her life that day in Gokula. She rose to the heavens in a flower-decked chariot, when Narayana touched her with his infant lips. The prophetic words came true and the boon was granted.

The subject of Putana, and her death by the infant Krishna, is a well-known story and, in the popular version, Putana is made out to be an ugly, witch-like creature.

It is also a popular dance performance by Kathakali dancers, but always Putana is an ugly witch. Probably, because of the psychological factor that a woman trying to kill a small child must be abnormal and the popular belief that, because she is evil she has to be ugly, because evil is ugly. Yet the

Puranas say she was a handsome woman, and desirable in a very blatant manner, what would in contemporary language be described as luscious and sexy.

The fact of this handsome woman smilingly trying to poison the child, makes the story more real, and has a greater relevance, to the unchanging values which the Puranas stress.

Putana is born to privilege, beauty, wealth, dignity of social position, and yet she lends herself to the ugliest of crimes that a woman can do.

There is all that glory of being a princess, to have the privilege of being a part in the leadership of a people but, because of the flaw in Putana's character, of what use is the value of her birth?

That is what the Putana story brings out when Sauti repeats the tale. He also stresses the point, that if a person only turns to Krishna, the transcendent, the shackles of evil fall away, and a person is on the path to purity of thinking. There is a proverb which says: "Of what use is it for a man to merely rise above his fellow men. A palm is tall but gives no shade."

Kerala carries along another tradition by remembering Maha Bali. The Keralites worship Bali as having once been their king. They say, the waters and regions below the waters of their land still belong to Maha Bali, their King. It is only the land, the dry land which belongs to Vishnu-Vamana-Narayana. They are not frightened of snakes. There is a village where every house is festooned with snakes, who live amicably with the human occupants. The traditional stories say, where Maha Bali was condemned to live is the home of the great serpents. And at their Onam festival, they celebrate Bali's return to earth to see his people.

Traditions and beliefs always seem to walk hand in hand in India, where yesterday and tomorrow both merge in today,

implying, what is time?

In Gokula one day, Nanda's wife, Yashoda, was busy about her housework with Krishna astride her hip. When she found the baby was nearly asleep, and as she could not do her work with a half-asleep child on her hip, she put Krishna to sleep in his cradle. She covered him with a piece of golden silk and then, picking up the brass water pots, went with her maids and gopis to the river Yamuna to bathe and fetch water for the house. Now, Kamsa's spies were always on the look-out to see if they could not harm little Sri Krishna.

Seeing the baby Krishna asleep, one of Kamsa's Daitya magicians, Trinavarta, created himself into a terrible whirlwind and lifted Krishna inside that whirligig and spun the child up and up. Then Krishna opened his eyes, and seeing the Daitya, he touched his throat with his hands. Strangled, the Daitya died and rose to the heavens in a chariot of flowers, but his whirling body slowly drifted to earth again, and swirling, put the baby Krishna down in another room, and subsided into dust, small pieces of grass and twigs.

Yashoda returned from the river, and not finding Krishna in his cradle, screamed in terror. The gopis ran into the courtyard, then ran into the house and found Krishna lying in another room. They stood amazed, wondering how this could have happened—did some evil spirit lift him up? Nanda picking Krishna up, held him close and kissed him over and over again. Rohini came running in from another room and took him away in her arms.

Fondling and kissing the baby Krishna, the women gave him a bath. They called in brahmins to chant prayers for his well-being. They gave the brahmins special food and alms and then, the house of Nanda was happy and at peace.

“Tell us, Sauti,” the sadhus said, “who was this Trinavarta Daitya and why did he go to heaven in a chariot of flowers?”

Sauti told them that once upon a time, a very long time ago, there was a king named Sahasra-aksa in Pandudesh. He was a very carnal man and he had many wives with whom he was always indulging in endless, lustful pleasures.

One day he, with his wives, was bathing in the river. Their behaviour was so boisterous, and they were so involved in their lewd pleasures, that they did not see Muni Durvasa coming towards the river bank.

Durvasa Muni was on his way to Kailasa, and even when he reached the riverside, Sahasra-aksa and his wives paid no attention to him. They did not stand in silence before the Muni, they did not greet him with proper courtesy.

The Muni's eyes grew red in anger at this behaviour and he called the king, “Listen, you foolish and sinful man, why do you never remember to pay some attention to your spiritual well-being. You are always a lewd and lustful creature, therefore go, be born as a Daitya on earth, and your wives, they shall each be born in separate homes, far from you. It is only a virtuous woman who is born to companion her husband in every subsequent life. But you and your wives forget every norm of decent behaviour, therefore be accursed.”

As Durvasa Muni was going away, Sahasra-aksa begged that he be given some word of salvation, for he realised his mistake and entreated the Muni for forgiveness. “Lift the curse, Muni, be merciful.”

“No word of mine can ever be changed, but your salvation will come when Narayana lives on earth. Till then, live out the consequence of your actions.”

His wives cried and clung to Sahasra-aksa. They said it would have been much better if they had stayed in the palace rooms, then none of this dreadful affair, this curse from the:

Muni's lips would have taken place. Sahasra-aksa, too, was horrified, filled with remorse and half demented. He said he saw no point in now returning to his palaces and his life of pleasure. He would build a funeral pyre and burn himself in it. His wives then said that they too would throw themselves into the pyre with him. At least in death, they would be with their beloved husband. He then built an enormous pyre and they flung themselves into it.

But in a future age Sahasra-akra was the magician Daitya Trinavarta who died at the touch of Sri Krishna.

His wives, though, were born in different places and in different homes, said Sauti.

The Trinavarta episode of Krishna's childhood is often to be seen in Pahari paintings, and also in some Rajasthani paintings.

In these paintings, Krishna is seen far up in the skies, a plump little tough child, battling with a goggle-eyed, hair-standing-on-end Daitya, while down below on earth, the cows stand sleek and fat under stylised trees. Sometimes, there are women running about with Yashoda holding up her arms in horror at the infant Krishna battling with the Daitya. There is always more than one version to the Puranic stories.

Every incident in Krishna's childhood and life keeps depicting the death of violence against him, yet Krishna's death-dealing action brings about calm in a whirlwind, or heaven, for either a Daitya, or a Putana.

One day, when the sun spread a blanket of golden light on the courtyard, Yashoda sat on a red and green stool nursing her child. The infant Krishna lay in her lap vigorously sucking her milk-heavy breasts and kicking his fat little legs. Yashoda was looking down tenderly at her baby as he grew

drowsy, and the milk dribbled out of the corner of his small lips.

Someone came to tell her that a few women from the homes of some other cowherds had come to visit her. She put Krishna down on the ground and went out. The visitors were asked to stay to eat their meal with her, and Yashoda became busy seeing to the food being prepared. After they had eaten everyone sat in the courtyard talking, laughing, gossiping and no one heard the baby cry.

Krishna, waking from his sleep, was hungry and wailed. No one came. He cried a little louder, still nothing happened, nobody came. He screamed, cried, yelled, roared—Yashoda was busy talking and, for once, not paying any attention to her beloved baby's cries.

Krishna's cries grew louder, he got angrier and kicked and kicked, bending backwards and screaming. During this bout of screaming and kicking, he managed to kick the small handcart which contained the milk, butter and curds ready for sale. The cart teetered, was unbalanced from the forked stick holding up the handle, and came crashing down.

The pots of milk broke and there were snaking rivers of milk all over the room. Round balls of butter and chunks of curd made a mess all over the floor and Krishna.

When they heard the noise, some small children playing outside, looked in and found the handcart upset with its contents all over the floor. Giggling, gaily they hopped and skipped over to Yashoda, dancing round her, told her that Krishna had broken the handcart and there was milk, butter and curd all over the place.

Yashoda hurried to Krishna to find him screaming, crying and kicking the floor in a fury of temper, while all over the room was a mass of milk, butter and curd. She picked him up, murmuring all the loving nonsense-words, mothers say to

quiet their children. The gopis stood around seeing the wreck caused by a small child's anger.

Nanda was sent for to be told about the disaster to the day's sale. Instead of getting angry, Nanda kissed the baby Krishna and sent for the priests to come and chant mantras to bring peace back into the disturbed atmosphere of his household. He also had a talisman tied round Krishna's arm to guard him from any harm.

One day Gargacharya, the official priest of the Yadava clan, came to Gokula and Nanda took advantage of his visit to have the naming-ceremony of Krishna and Balarama done by him.

Soon Gokula became a vast medley of singing, dancing people, while the smoke of cooking fires drifted around. Yashoda's father came and many rishis and munis, for they knew that this was an extraordinary occasion.

Gargacharya took the child Krishna in his arms and smiling to himself, put a tilak of sandalwood paste on the baby's forehead, sprinkled mantra-purified water on him, put a few drops of milk, butter, curd, honey and ghee on the infant lips, and blessed him, while in his heart the old priest sang in praise of Narayana. He named the baby, Krishna.

The rishis and munis blessed him, they chanted mantras to Narayana.

Then Gargacharya took Rohini's child in his lap, repeated the ceremonies and named him Balarama.

Gargacharya turned to Nanda and Yashoda and said he must speak to them privately. When the three were alone, he told them Krishna was Devaki's son. Nanda looked down in silence, for he knew. Yashoda looked stunned.

One day Krishna would have to leave them, Gargacharya

warned. One day, he must fulfil his duty and remove the sorrows of the wretched; one day Kamsa would have to be destroyed. He told them that Radha was Narayani-Lakshmi, and that she and Krishna would be together in Gokula, then the great parting would take place when Akrur would come to call Krishna to Mathura.

This was all in the future, and today, Nanda and Yashoda must only remember that Krishna was their son.

Most of what Gargacharya said was meaningless to both of them, but Nanda absorbed some of it. Yashoda could think of Krishna only as her baby, her little son. Nothing else meant anything, and there was all that concourse of people to be fed. The brahmins had to be given alms, they had to be satisfied so that they would bless her child—her beautiful blue-dark baby, with his fat little arms and legs.

The ceremonies were completed. Nanda and Yashoda went down to the ground in humility of spirit, to the rishis and munis. They asked forgiveness for any discomfort that the holy men might have had to suffer. They stood with folded hands and downcast eyes while they and the children were blessed. Then the old men went away.

Gokula swirled into colour and song. The gopa and gopis danced through the days and nights, while Krishna kicked his legs in happiness.

And so the days, weeks and months went by. Krishna grew strong and mischievous as he learnt to crawl and toddle about, walk and talk.

One day, when Yashoda had gone to the river with the womenfolk of her household, Krishna woke up from his sleep and realised that he was all alone in the house. Happily he wandered about knocking down every pot he could reach. Down tumbled the pots of milk and curds. There were bowls put out for the cream to settle. Large containers full of milk

thickened golden brown on a slow fire. Great rounds of butter on special platters. It all fell, all got trampled and danced upon. Some was eaten by Krishna, and he was playing in this chaos, created by him, when Yashoda returned.

Aghast, and then angry, she scolded him for being a naughty, wicked boy. She was going to beat him and she picked up the churning stick.

But Krishna said he did not know how all this had got broken. "I did not eat any butter, Mother."

This was altogether too much for Yashoda. "Oh, you. . ." she gasped in near speechless anger when Krishna, understanding his mother's temper, ran. Yashoda chased him as he dodged her. Here, there, in and out of rooms and round the courtyard, then, seeing Yashoda angry, exhausted, with her hair dishevelled and coming down, Krishna allowed her to catch him, for he could not let poor Yashoda suffer any kind of discomfort because of him.

Angry and scolding him, Yashoda tied his hands together with a scarf and hauling him outside tied him with the other end of the scarf to the Yamalarjuna tree. Saying, "Now you just stay there," she went indoors to clean up the mess made by Krishna.

Krishna looked at his hands, looked at the tree and leaned against it. At the touch of his body the tree creaked, and a wonderful handsome man took form and then the tree came crashing down. As the tree crashed, the young man climbed into a chariot of flowers and melted away into the skies.

Hearing the sound of the tree crashing down, Yashoda came rushing out and saw the fallen tree. Hurriedly she untied Krishna's little hands and picking him up slung him on her hips. What could have happened that this tree fell, she wondered, as she dusted her baby's legs and arms.

The gopas and gopis came running to see what had happen-

ed and were horrified, on hearing that Yashoda had tied Krishna to the tree. How could she have done such a thing! Supposing the tree had fallen on Krishna, then what would have happened, they said. A home in which there is a son is paradise but a childless home is a lonely, soulless house. A child must be cared for, guarded, and not tied to a tree. How could Yashoda be so cruel and heartless.

The more poor Yashoda tried to explain her exasperation at her child's naughtiness, the worse it all became. Even Nanda roared at her, shouting, "It is my wealth and my loss. What right have you to make so great an issue over such a minor matter." His poor child being tied to a tree! What a horrible thing to do—but Narayana had saved him.

Nanda sent for the priest to chant mantras and, in thanks-giving for his baby Krishna being safe, in all of Gokula a special puja to Satya-Narayana was ordered to be performed.

Bells rang, incense smoke wafted in the evening air, mantras were chanted and songs were sung everywhere. Krishna sat in Yashoda's lap and smiled and kissed her, all over her face, with his hot baby breath, and a laughing mouth.

At the forest hermitage of Naimisa, the sadhus asked Sauti who was this young man who had appeared from the tree. They wished to hear the story.

Sauti told them the story: Once the god Kubera's son, Nala Kubera, went to the garden where flowers always bloom, where the breeze blows cool and pleasant, the mind finds rest and where always there is an aura of peace.

Nala Kubera came there with his wife, and as they strolled along, he was shaken by waves of passion. Making a bed of flowers and petals he lay with his wife, and so lost were they in love-play, that they did not notice the rishi Devala coming into the garden. When the rishi saw these two so lost in the

grasp of passion, he was displeased. He spoke to them harshly, scolding them for behaving in so lewd a manner in a garden meant for peace and where rishis and gods came, filled with holy thoughts.

"Since you are so egotistical and thoughtless, and since what you want is all that matters, the evolution of your consciousness seems to have stopped. Therefore, go down to earth, Nala Kubera, and sparing you the lower stages of life, I say, go, wait on earth rooted as a tree. Wait till you are touched by the Lord Narayana."

His wife, Rambha, was equally reprimanded. Nala Kubera was that Yamalarjuna tree.

To fully appreciate the Puranic stories, and the stories within the Hindu philosophic writings, the heart and mind of a poet is necessary. The episode of the Yamalarjuna tree is a true poetic allegory contained within the explanatory story told by Sauti.

This garden is the garden where the mind rests as it walks towards yoga-samadhi, or Unity. There, the mind, instead of enjoying the peace of its surroundings, is caught within the meshes of the senses. So involved is the mind, that it disregards the holy Rishi-word, or Guru-mantra, even when it appears within the mind. In other words, the Guru-mantra is present but the Nala-Kubera mind is too busy in Rambha-thoughts to pay due attention to Devala rishi or the Guru-mantra.

In such a condition the Nala-Kuberamind might as well be a tree rooted in one place, or condition. The path to salvation opens when the mind turns towards, and is therefore, touched by Krishna or perfect yoga.

As they grew older, Krishna and Balarama went with the herders and the cows and Nanda's vast herd of cattle to the

forest. It was only the young boys who stayed with the cattle as they grazed.

The youngsters ran about, they climbed trees, swung from branches, ate berries and fruit. And always Krishna was their leader, leading them on to one more hazardous branch where the sweetest fruit hung. He climbed the tallest trees, brought the fruit down and pushed these into their mouths. The juice trickled down and the boys shouted, played, and tumbled on the grass, where the cows grazed and occasionally looked up, alarmed by their boisterousness.

Krishna chased the calves as they bawled and ran on their unsteady long legs. He tied their tails together and giggled at their absurd look of bewilderment. When the children were tired, Krishna helped them milk some of the cows. Then, replete with fun, fruit and milk, he wiped his mouth with a yellow silk scarf, tucked peacock feathers into his curly black hair, and picking up his flute, played lovely, soft tunes.

So charming were these lilting tunes, that the cows would stop grazing, and stand looking at him. The calves would stop butting at the udders of their cow-mothers and, with milk-dripping faces, gaze at Krishna with huge brown eyes. His friends, the gopa-herder boys, lying on the grass, listened to the ravishing sound of the flute that tugged at their emotions and made the tears rise in their eyes.

Sauti said: It was on a day like this when, from the dark of the forest, Bakasura and Dhenuka asura appeared. Krishna was swallowed by the stork-like Bakasura, but who can hold Krishna within himself with evil motives? So Bakasura died.

When the Dhenuka asura, in the form of a huge cow, came charging towards the gopa boys, and they were frightened into screaming and running away, Krishna touched its horn

and that was the end of the asura. Then together, the two asuras rose to heaven in a heavenly chariot.

"What is the story behind these incidents," the sadhus said, "We are filled with curiosity and wish to know."

Sauti then told them the story: The ruler of the Gandharvas had four sons. Handsome, tall and a delight to the eyes. The boys grew up devoted to Krishna-Narayana.

One day, two of the sons had a desire to do puja to Krishna-Narayana with the most beautiful lotus they could find. They headed towards what was known as the Painted Lake.

The whole lake was a vast mass of lotus blooms. They entered the water and were plucking armsful of the flowers, when they were caught by guards, and dragged ashore.

They learnt this lake was guarded by Lord Shiva's guards and they were taken before him. Accused of theft, they joined their hands in prayer and begged to be forgiven. They did not know these waters belonged to Shiva, or that the flowers were his.

Shiva told them that this was the Devi's property, and she was very angry, for she used a thousand lotuses every day for her puja to Shiva.

The Gandharva sons said they had wanted the lotus to pray to Krishna-Narayana. "But we know, that between Krishna and Shiva, there is no difference. You are both the Ultimate Intelligence, you are both lords of all worlds." And they begged to be allowed to do puja to Shiva and the Devi with the lotus they had gathered.

Pleased as he was at their devotion, Shiva had to deny them this privilege. The Devi was displeased and, because they were wrong to pluck the flowers which belonged to her, they had to take the consequent punishment.

"Go, be born on earth for a little while as an asura, and when Krishna touches you return to your place in Gokala,

Krishna-Narayana's heaven?"

The two Gandharva sons were Bakasura and Dhenuka asura.

The story of Bakasura and Dhenuka asura has the meaning given within the name. Once again Sanskrit semantics hide the inner meaning. Both names deal with sound and the yoga of meditation, and the absorption of the very vehicle of sound in final yoga.

But the point is that Puranic stories were meant to entertain the listeners. Not everybody need be either listening for entertainment or listening from the stand of being wise like the sadhus of Naimisa. Yet even they wish to hear stories for the sake of stories. The meanings could be understood by thought and cogitation later on.

In the evening, the gopa boys and Krishna returned to Gokula and the gopa boys ran home to tell people about the asuras and how Krishna had killed them.

The stork seemed to swallow him, they said. They could not see Krishna and then there he was, once again, jumping around with a dead stork at his feet. Its beak was open and gaping at them, they said. It was a horrible sight, and such a big beak, some said. It looked like an asura. Then there was that other wild cow, that rushed about amidst the herd, frightening the little calves. How the cows had bawled! "How could you have seen it?", some of the other boys laughed, making fun of the younger ones, "You were much too busy crying and running away." The horns of the wild cows were huge—that big, the little gopa boys said, spreading their arms wide.

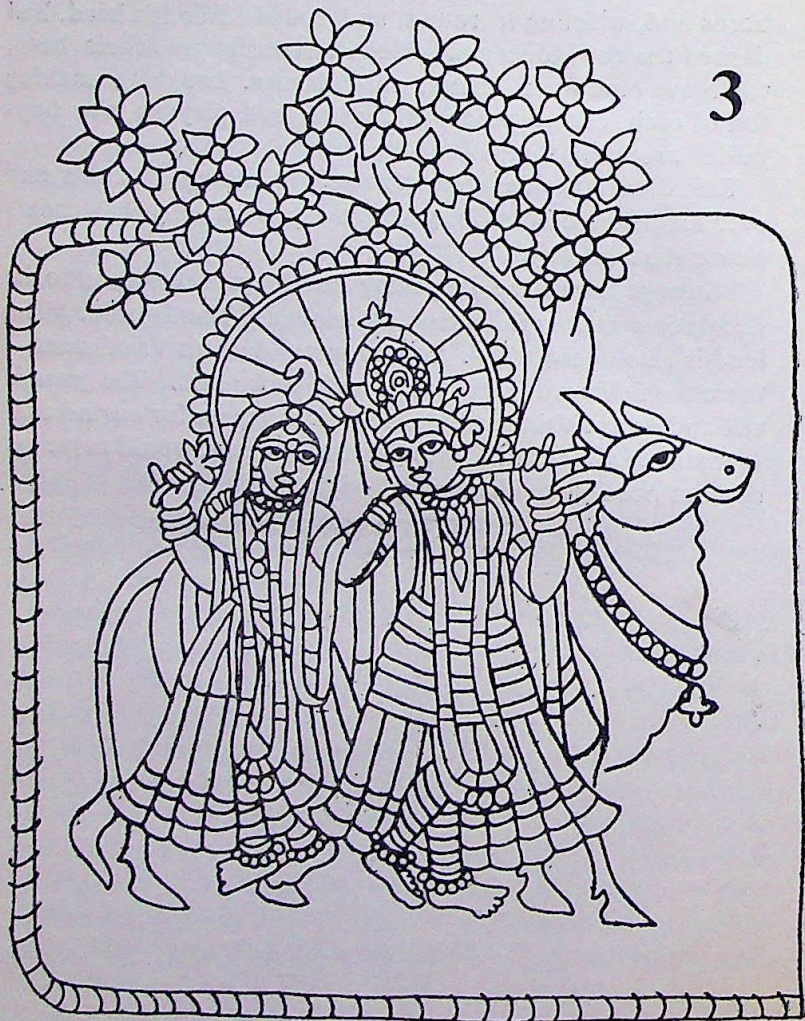
As soon as Krishna ran towards the cow and got hold of its horns, the cow stumbled and fell, and then it was dead, some said. Others said Krishna had picked up the cow by its

horns and, whirling it round and round over his head, had dashed the cow down and killed it. Krishna was their hero, the brave one, their friend, their leader. Laughing, making fun of each other, prancing around and playing, the boys milled around.

The older people were alarmed. Nothing like this had ever happened before. They had an elders' meeting in Nanda's house the next day.

"Strange things are happening nowadays, there seem to be dangerous and evil spirits all around," Nanda said. "The land is also over-grazed. Let us move over to Vrindavana—there the fields are full of vetch and wild grain. The grass is tall and green. Vrindavana is a beautiful place for our herds."

It was decided that they, with their herds, would move as soon as possible to Vrindavana.



Once it was decided to move to Vrindavana there was a turmoil of busyness in every household.

Things had to be packed—pots for their dairy business, household goods, clothes. They herded together the cows and the calves, some newly born and still unsteady on their legs.

Their donkeys, horses, elephants were loaded with goods. The children ran about creating further confusion. Some little girl cried for her armless rag doll that was being left behind; some little boy wanted to take his bashed-in drum that his mother had thrown away. Exasperated mothers scolded their children, the men shouted for one more piece of baggage to balance the load on the animal. The older boys ran in and out of the rows of animals, led by the laughing, mischievous curly-headed Krishna.

When at last, the whole clan was ready to move, he and his gopa friends danced towards the elephant and, climbing up on Nanda's largest elephant, Krishna shouted, "Let us go to Vrindavana!" and his yellow scarf and clothes, his peacock feather headdress led the way. As his flute sent out a shrill plaintive note, the elephant swayed forward on his ponderous way, and the gopa boys beat time on their drums. The Dhak and Dhol drums beat out the rhythm, the boys and girls swung into a dance, some sang, some played on the shinga and somewhere, some one sitting on the back of a swaying elephant played on the veena.

A cloud of dust rose over Gokula as Nanda's clan moved on their way to Vrindavana. Then, when the dust settled down, Gokula was empty. The dust was never to know the dancing feet of Krishna again. The river would never again sparkle with droplets from that curly head, the river bank would not share the laughter of Krishna and his gopas. The birds grew silent and trees stood in the windless silence, quiet amidst the dusty grass of Krishna-deserted Gokula.

Nanda's clan moved on, with Krishna and Balarama sleeping on gold painted cots, swung on poles carried by four strong, carrier-trained men. The shuffle of the elephant's feet, the lowing of cows, the rumble of chariot and cart wheels, made a creaking, croaking, happy noise and as Vrindavana came into sight, veiled in mist, soft and green, a huge sigh of contentment rose from the herders.

Here the grass was extra long, silky and luscious. The cattle would grow fatter, the cows give more milk. Here the Yamuna seemed more blue, the flowers grew abundantly and with a stronger scent. The trees were more beautiful with thick, dark foliage. Vrindavana was the ideal land for the herders.

They spread themselves out all over this green and happy land. Some, unloading the baggage animals, lay down under

the trees on the soft ground. The boys climbed trees and dared the girls to follow them. The women walked away to the river to fill their water pots, the men went to wash or bathe. The older men gathered together to decide the building of the new houses and new homes. These should be built straight away, they said.

As the older men sat around discussing and deciding, Krishna came dancing up to Nanda and, putting his arms round Nanda's neck, asked when they would be doing Chandi puja. He had seen a beautiful old banyan tree and it was possible for any number of people to gather under it.

The older men looked at Krishna in surprise. Nanda kissed his beloved son and, running his hand tenderly over Krishna's head, said he was quite right to remind them that Devi puja must be done, before any home was built.

"Come, let us go," Nanda said, and he and the clan herdsmen gathered under the banyan tree. Incense and sandalwood, and the wavering light of small lamps, begged the Devi for her blessing.

The glowing embers from cooking fires gleamed through the night as Nanda's clan slept. Tomorrow they would build their houses and these embers would start the fires in their hearths.

As the days went by, they built so beautiful a settlement that it seemed Vishwakarma, the architect of the gods, had helped them to plan so lovely a village and its surroundings. There was a garden park full of flowers on one side and avenues of flowering trees on the other. All around there were arcades of trailing malati and mallika creepers, with jasmine of every kind, colour, and scent, both trailing and in clumps of bushes. The gay green of sal trees or the dark green of palasa, with its flaming red flowers, bordered the winding paths and enhanced the effect of light and shade.

Palms grew beside pools and small lakes. The landscape of Vrindavana grew to have the look of a place where the gods walked with those they loved.

"What is it that makes Vrindavana so holy?" the sadhus asked, and sitting on a platform under a magnificent tree in Naimisa, Sauti told them the story and meaning of Vrindavana.

In the Satya Yuga, the first Yuga when purity was the dominant quality, there lived a king named Kedara. He was a good king and lived to a great age surrounded by wealth, happiness and sons.

His mind was always centred on Krishna-Narayana. He was so devoted that there never had been such devotion, neither will there ever be such devotion again. His prayers, his yagnas, his *tapas* were always with a full heart but he never wanted to gain any power, neither did he ask the gods for any boon.

When Kedara grew old, he handed over his kingdom to his son, and left to spend the rest of his days in calm meditation. Eventually he left his mortal body, and Kedara is the place of most holy pilgrimage.

Kedara had a daughter named Kamalasha. She was given her guru-mantra by Durvasa Muni and became a great pandita, and learned in all the Shastras. She moved away from her life of comfort in palaces and, giving up the soft touch of silks, put on the harsh bark-cloth of an ascetic and moved into the forest to do *tapas*. She prayed to Krishna, calling him to her. Years went by and the beautiful princess never stopped her prayers, *tapas* and meditation of Krishna.

One day she had a vision of the smiling Lord. His diadem flashed, his earrings glinted and holding his flute, with that enigmatic smile upon his lips, he stood before her.

Her heart melted within her in ecstasy, her limbs turned to water. A desire to fall into his arms overwhelmed her.

Krishna looked at her and smiling asked, what boon did she want.

She whispered that he should never leave her, that he was her Lord, her love, husband and companion. "Never leave me."

Krishna said, "So be it," and the vision faded.

Sauti said, Vrindavana is where she became a part of Krishna. Vrindavana is where the parts become the whole.

Vrindavana is where Krishna is always the Lord. Vrindavana is where the unending *lila* of Krishna never ends. Vrindavana is the place where Krishna is present, where he lives. Vrindavana is within our hearts, sadhus.

Vrindavana is also the place where two other princesses, the daughters of the king Kushadhwaja, did years of penance and *tapas*.

One day in Vrindavana, the gopa boys and Krishna went far into the forest. They were playing all sorts of boyish games, climbing trees and letting the cattle graze on further and further, deeper and deeper, into the forest. After some time, the boys were exhausted and lay, sat, lolled on the ground, asking Krishna about their food.

"What are we to do about our food? We are so far from home, what shall we do?"

Krishna fiddled about with his flute, looked around, and told them that there was a forest hermitage not very far from where they were. They were to go and ask the brahmins for some food. They were bound to give it, they would never refuse the children.

The gopa boys got up, found the forest track and managed

to find the hermitage.

They went up to the brahmins and repeated their rehearsed request: They had strayed too far into the forest, they were hungry and Krishna and Balarama had sent them to ask for some food. But the brahmins were at their prayers and they could not speak or interrupt the ritual, until it had been completed.

The gopa boys then went round to where the wives of the brahmins were cooking the food and made the same request. Being women, they listened to the boys but wanted to know exactly who was it who had sent them here. It was Krishna and Balarama, the boys repeated again.

"Krishna?" the Brahmin women said, smiling. "We must see him and give him this food from the hermitage."

Picking up a platter, they piled it with whatever could be spared after their husbands' food had been set aside and went with the gopa boys to where Krishna was waiting.

The brahmin women made all the boys sit down in a row, while they plucked green leaves, and pinned them together with stalks, and made them into small cups and platters. They served the food with loving care and, enchanted with Krishna, they served him with greater care and loving looks.

The boys got up, washed their mouths and hands and drank cool clear water from a small stream nearby. While the boys had turned away and were washing and playing with the water, the brahmin women looked again and again at Krishna. Slowly the curly-headed boy seemed to fade and in his place stood Narayana. Their hearts stopped in wonder and, while their bodies remained on the ground, rooted on earth, they felt they had stepped into the flower-filled chariot to rise to the heavens. Then all faded away, the shouting boys were, again, all around them and Krishna was the smiling boy who looked at them, and walked away.

“Who were these brahmin women? Tell us, Sauti, we want to hear more and more of these stories from you.”

The birds sang among the flowering trees in the forest hermitage of Naimisa, as Sauti explained and told the sadhus another story of long ago.

Once, the wives of the Seven Rishis were walking in their garden. The beauty of the rishis' wives glowed like the light of the moon on crystal waters. They had slim waists and high breasts. They were virtuous and famous for their devotion to their husbands.

The Deva, Agni, came into the garden, and seeing these beautiful women, he coveted them and desire made him look, and look again, at them. Conscious of these looks, the rishi's wives looked at Agni, and as his desire licked them, their own glances at him became frequent, fluttering and lascivious.

The Rishi Angirasa saw them from the other end of the garden and he was so angry, so furious, that his whole body trembled and shook. He called out to Devi Agni, “Is this the way the wise and knowledgable behave? It is ignoble and unworthy of you, Agni, that you should cast covetous looks at other men's wives. For this, Agni, I am cursing you. You will be the eater of all foul and evil things. Nothing will remain yours, everything will turn to ashes.”

Agni was shocked into realising his folly. He struck his forehead in remorse and cried out to Angirasa to forgive him. But the more he begged Angirasa, the angrier the Rishi became.

Angirasa turned towards the women and, with eyes blood-shot in furious anger, he cursed them.

“And you, you lascivious women, who have so forgotten your Dharma, go down to be earth-born women. There, in the courtyard of brahmins, live as their wives and women.”

The rishis' wives wept, cried and fell at Angirasa's feet.

“How shall we live without our own husbands? How long do we have to expiate our sins? Tell us, Rishi, forgive us, lighten the burden of our banishment.”

The other rishis came up and, hearing the terrible curses of Angirasa, stood aghast, unable to do anything, for nothing can change the flow of cause and effect. They kept gazing at their wives and crying, for even the ascetic rishis were filled with tenderness when they saw the faces of these gentle women bathed with tears.

How would they exist without their Shakti, their power, the other half of themselves, for being parted from the beloved a person is hardly living or alive.

Angirasa said that each person must accept the result of their action. No one can escape that, and the fruits of sin and wrong have eventually to be gathered. “Go, live on earth and one day when the feet of Narayana are in front of your eyes, you shall be released.”

Sauti said, these brahmin women were the wives of the Saptarishis—the Seven Rishis.

The stories from the Puranas sometimes remind listeners of some point of Shastric knowledge by, what seems, a minor detail. For instance, in the story of the brahmin women, when they are serving Krishna, twice he looks at them. There is a hymn, or *stuti*, in which Narayana's love for those devoted to him, is praised with the analogy, that the Lord by his very look guards his loved one, just as a mother-tortoise cares for her small ones only by her loving look and her guarding sight.

Krishna, looking at the women, helped them to send their thoughts and minds to the waters of love, which were the thoughts of Krishna-Narayana, and thereby they got their release from the bonds of mortal life, to which they really

never belonged.

There was only one sin they had committed, with its cause and reaction, but they had turned against their basic nature at its level of evolution. They were the wives of rishis but, if they behaved stupidly, a price had to be paid.

It is all rather on the lines of a morality play and also a delightful fantasy story, with Fire-Agni devouring everything, both clean and unclean but remaining a Deva, and pure.

The more detailed explanation about the Seven Rishis is that they are also meant to represent "the seven who sit round the heaven" of our head—two eyes, two ears, two nostrils and the mouth.

Their wives are the action of the senses and the Deva Agni is the fire of *tapas*. It burns up everything. The Rishi Angirasa is Breath, or Prana, and there are the *pranas*, or life, of each sensory organ. As wives of the rishis, they sinned, but as wives of learned brahmins, through the loving looks of guardian Intelligence, they obtained their release.

It is also said that the Sapta Rishis are rishis who, for the benefit of mankind, have refused final release and remain in some subtle region to help thought, all those who walk along the holy path of purity of thinking, forbearance and forgiveness.

Dawn was just filling the sky with her pink scarves when Krishna and the gopa boys herded the cattle together and led them off, towards the forest grazing grounds.

Today, Balarama had been left behind and Krishna led the boys and the herds of cattle in a different direction. They went past the banks of the Yamuna until they reached a place where normally the boys never came. There was a dark, deep pool here and the water was supposed to be poisonous.

"Even if the birds fly over it they fall down dead," the gopa boys said.

Krishna laughed and led them on past the pool but the cattle were thirsty. As a few of the cows drank the water, they fell down on their knees, began to pant and gasp, then they were dead. The gopa boys ran back in horror to Krishna.

"Look what has happened! What shall we do? It is the Poison Pool, Krishna, let us go back, let us leave this place."

Krishna would not listen, he told them there was nothing to be frightened of and if they earnestly repeated, "What is there to be afraid of, we are not afraid," even the cows would come alive. They went back to their cows and repeated the phrase. The cows came alive.

Krishna stood looking at the grim dark waters, and the thought that, if the Poison Pool was allowed to exist the danger to the cows would continue, made him determined to take some action. He climbed up a Kadamba tree and, getting on to one of its branches, he plunged into the waters. He went down, down, deep into the murky poisoned waters.

As he disappeared, the gopa boys shouted in panic trying to stop him. "It is too late. Krishna is lost to us! The terrible serpent Kaliya will destroy him. What will happen to us? What shall we do? Krishna, come back!" the gopa boys wept on the banks of the Poison Pool.

Kaliya rose out of the water with his hood expanded and breathed poison at Krishna. He struck him but nothing happened to Krishna. Then Kaliya tried to swallow him. Krishna caught him by the throat, flung him down in the water and danced on his head. Kaliya could not hold up that weight and sank down. Kaliya was dying, vomiting venom. Kaliya's wives came rushing forward to help, but seeing Krishna dancing on Kaliya's head, knew this was the end of their life in the Poison Pool.

They begged Krishna to let Kaliya go, they begged forgiveness. They asked to be allowed to live somewhere else. He told them to go and live in the ocean.

Sauti said: Kaliya saw a vision of Krishna-Narayana and breathed a *stuti* of praises.

The serpents are marked by Krishna's feet. Sadhus, and those who see that mark and know that they are the marks of Krishna's feet, are safe. If a serpent is struck with sticks and stones, the serpent strikes back. It is always a matter of cause and effect. That is the law of dharma, the working of the natural laws, for each one does whatever is in his nature to do, but the consequences are always the result of the action.

When Krishna disappeared under the waters of the dreaded pool, some gopa boys ran back to call the older gopas for help.

Yashoda had got up to attend to her housework but she began to feel restless, uncomfortable, and as if something was wrong. Her right arm was twitching, she wondered what could be wrong. Today, her Krishna had gone alone with the cowherds. No one older had gone with them. She hoped nothing had gone wrong. Worried, nervous and somewhat overwrought, she began to cry and the gopis tried to console her. They promised to send someone to go into the forest to look for Krishna.

Just then, one of the gopa boys who had been with Krishna came, running and panting, to tell them about Krishna having jumped into the Poison Pool.

Some of the older gopas went running to the forest with the gopa boys. Some went running to fetch Nanda. Some stayed to console Yashoda.

Yashoda wept and cried, "Where is my Krishna, the jewel of my eyes? Why did he have to go alone into the forest today?"

Who will now call me Mother, who will worry me asking for butter and cream? Where will I hear that laughing, lispings voice? Who will tug at the corner of my head cloth, who will tumble into my arms and sit in my lap. Where is my Krishna, my beloved Gopala? How will I stay alive without the light of my eyes? Every evening I watch the path by which he will bring the cattle home, it was the most golden moment of the day. How will I now watch that hour? Where is my Krishna, I too will follow where he has gone."

When Yashoda had been quietened, they all went towards the Poison Pool. Nanda was supported by the gopas, the gopis surrounded Yashoda.

They saw the gopa boys lying on the ground shivering and crying.

Yashoda, crying, "Oh Krishna, Krishna!" tried to throw herself into the pool, and when they caught hold of her, she collapsed on the ground, weeping and distraught. Nanda, too, could hardly console her, for he was himself overwrought.

Just then, Balarama came and asked why were they so distressed, and talking of doing away with their lives? "My brother Krishna must be here somewhere. He will return."

And, soon enough, Krishna appeared, and looking at the state of his parents, asked why was everyone crying?

Yashoda pulled him into her arms and smothered him with kisses. Nanda took him from her and held him close in his arms. The gopas and gopis rubbed him down with their hands as they scolded and fussed over him.

Then, led by Krishna and Balarama, the gopa boys, the cattle, Yashoda, Nanda and all the others returned to Vrindavana when the sun turned the dust to gold.

Puranic stories should not have all their charm taken away by being turned inside out.

The stories carry within them great seeds to the path of wisdom and knowledge and they are all far, far, more than what they seem. Quite often a lesson in psychology is given, as in the Kaliya story.

Man has within himself a poison pool and horrible serpents of memories, guilt, remorse. They rear up and attack but Krishna, the great master of Yoga, destroys the serpents, as every other person can, too. It is a universal truth that the Kaliya episode illustrates.

Krishna dances on the expanded hood and then he stands still holding his dancing pose.

The idea and the lesson of the Puranic story remains that one cannot continue to run away, and even prayers, or holy sounds, are not really effective as long as the poison pool remains. Its destruction is the final answer but destruction, not with violence but by the effect of love, or loving kindness and forgiveness acquired through yoga.

On another level, the Puranic stories refer to the lessons and truths of the yoga or meditation, by which a person acquires a sense of detachment, and is not overwhelmed by the experiences of life.

So the Puranic stories tell you a story just as you want it—at each listener's level. They are like stories told by fairies sitting in a magic circle, but are not fairy tales. All that mortal listeners need, is to have hearts of love, and ears to hear the magic of poetry. Puranic stories should not have too much intellection brought into them while they are being re-told, yet, it is only with intellection and knowledge, that they can be fully or properly understood.

The Kaliya story has more than one version and more than any one single interpretation.

At one stage, when Krishna danced so long on his hood that Kaliya was near to death, his wives prayed to Krishna,

and Kaliya himself said, "I have acted only according to my nature. Had I behaved differently, I would have violated the laws you have yourself laid down for me."

Krishna then said, "Go. You must not stay near the Yamuna but go, be part of the vastness of the ocean."

Viewed from the angle of psychology, the sorrows and remorse are sent into the vast ocean of a full personality where regrets no longer poison the clear stream of love. A stream that represents love for another, as well as love and forgiveness for one's own self.

In another interpretation, Krishna, by not killing Kaliya but banishing him to the vast ocean, gave recognition to the rights of the destructive power. After all, the venomous snake was as much a manifestation of Cosmic Intelligence as the cowherds.

Krishna brought back the balance, each was saved from the other. Each lived within their own spheres—the cowherds were now safe and so was Kaliya, for he moved away. Krishna restored the working equilibrium of opposites. The evil of Kaliya was not allowed to overwhelm the peace and beauty of living in Vrindavana.

The lovely playful days of childhood went by, each more golden than the one before.

In Vrindavana the grass was greener, the flowers more full of scent and colour. But from Mathura, Kamsa's enmity would send an occasional spy, or an assassin.

One was sent dressed as a gopa herdsman but Krishna signalled to Balarama to attend to him and big, bouncing, strong Balarama gave him such a wrestler's fall that that was the end of the demon gopa.

Once a wild horse was sent to scatter the cattle and hurt the

gopas. But Krishna climbed on to a Kadamba tree and played on his flute. When that lovely melody floated down, the wild horse, snorting, pawed the ground and then stood still. The cows stopped running away. The little calves trotted by their mothers, as the ponderous, big, uddered cows walked back and stood around the Kadamba tree.

This flute had become a matter of great controversy, and a talking point among the young gopis of Vrindavana.

"Why do the cows stop to listen? Why do they come back even from the depths of the forest when Krishna plays the flute?"

"And why do you stop churning when you hear the flute?" another gopi would tease.

"How fortunate the flute is always held against his lips!"

"You are shameless," a little gopi would say, hitching her head cloth over her shoulder and jingling her bangles.

"Think of the devotion of the bamboo to Krishna. It allowed itself to be cut; it endured the pain of heat and fire, and drenchings with cold water, then it hung roasting over the heat of embers. Think of its *tapas*. No wonder the music is sweet breathed through the flute by Krishna's lips."

"Little philosopher! Wait till Mother hears you—then you will be in trouble."

Giggling and laughing the gopis would nudge each other or else, chided by Radha who was older than them all, would busy themselves with the minor household work they were meant to do.

On a day when winter's cold was moving away, the girls and Radha went to the banks of the Yamuna. Radha was the oldest among them. Her father was Vrishbham and she was soon to be married as she was now old enough. The girls made a mud image of the Devi and prayed that the Devi find good husbands and handsome men. As they strewed flowers

on their simple prayer place and lit their sticks of incense, Krishna's flute began to play.

They found him sitting on his favourite Kadamba tree, watching and laughing at them. The young girls grinned back, and pert and flirtatious as most young girls are, they added a few words of their own to the set words of prayers they had been taught at home. "Devi, may our husbands be handsome, curly haired, adorned with peacock feathers, for the flute has vanquished our hearts."

Giggling and laughing, they huddled together to complete the ceremony, while Krishna crept up behind them and stole the food kept as offerings.

Krishna was a favourite with the girls. They made garlands for him, they had flower battles with the round globes of the Kadamba flowers. If they went to bathe, Krishna was somewhere around playing on the flute.

One day, the girls left their clothes and were splashing and swimming about in the water and never saw that Krishna had crept up, stolen all their clothes, and was sitting hidden in the branches of a Kadamba tree. One of the girls came out of the water to dress but there was nothing there. She called out to someone, to ask where she had put the clothes.

"What do you mean, where are your clothes, they are all there."

"They are not. There is nothing here."

There were squeals and screams but it did not help, for the clothes had just vanished and there was no trace of them.

Now they were in trouble, for they had taken all their clothes off, except for one thin piece of cloth wrapped round them, and it was wet and diaphanous. How would they go home? A few of the girls began to cry. "What shall we do", they wailed.

Then someone saw the reflection of something move on the

water, a few petals of flowers fell. There was the sound of the flute, but Krishna could not be seen. Shivering with cold and fright, the girls began to call out to Krishna, asking where he was and to please come out.

"Give us back our clothes, Krishna." They begged, they pleaded, but all they heard was the soft notes of the flute. Then Krishna parted the branches and said to them to come to him, beg him, plead, join their hands and pray, and only then would they get their clothes back.

"We are ashamed of you, Krishna! You are wicked, wicked. All you can do is laugh, and while we are dying, you draw our hearts out by the sound of your flute."

Krishna teased them, until they had to come up to him and receive the clothes from his hands.

Thoroughly enraged, the gopis flounced home, while Krishna pressed the peacock feather at a jauntier slant into his thick black curls, and sent plaintive notes on his flute to follow them.

The seasons changed and rituals, festivals, pujas followed the change.

Then it was the season of the rains and Nanda's clan was preparing to hold the annual festival and puja to Indra, the god of rain and thunderbolts.

Krishna saw the preparations going on, as he had seen it happen every year, but this year, he spoke against worship of Indra.

"What will Indra do for you? He is not God but only a deva of rain. He, like all that is perishable, will also perish. Let us worship the Imperishable and, as we are told the Imperishable is everywhere, let us pray to the hill of Govardhana."

There was quite a bit of argument over the affair—whether to worship Indra, with all the usual rituals, or start some-

thing new, by praying to the Imperishable this year.

"Krishna is too young to give us advice."

"But the boy speaks sense," the others said.

Finally it was agreed to have a very simple affair. There would be no elaborate rituals as they normally had. Only a few flowers and fruit, a little incense and their own dairy products—ghee, butter, cream, milk, with honey to sweeten it.

The clan gathered and, with great reverence, they prayed to the Imperishable. They made the whole hill of Govardhana the symbol of "That which is within everything" which they had been taught by their Guru.

There was laughter and great joy that day, and an old woman said she had seen a vision of the four-armed Vishnu, but they told her she was old and imagining things. It was only Krishna standing there.

"He blazed with the light of a thousand suns and I am blinded by that glory."

Someone else said, "It is the grace of the Imperishable one." Krishna laughed, played on his flute and ran around.

And that night the rains came. It rained and it rained and it rained. The skies grew dark as a witch-brew of hell, the thunder rolled rods of iron across the skies, lightning zigzagged thin whiplashes of flame amid the mountainous clouds, and it kept raining.

The deluge increased the next day, as the rain came down, piercing sharp as arrows. The herders were terrified. The younger women, holding their small babies to their frightened selves, and the older ones slinging their youngest on to their hips, headed for Nanda's house.

"Our homes will be washed away. This is Indra's anger against us."

"We have never seen such rain. Indra will not forgive us.

Look at that rain."

"We should never have listened to Krishna."

Krishna knit his brows and said, "What can Indra do when you have worshipped the Imperishable. Be courageous and say we do not fear for we have faith. Go and find caves in the hill of Govardhana, until the storm passes. You will be safe there."

"Quite right. Sensible boy. Let us all go," they said. Then Nanda and Yashoda, the gopas, everybody, crept into caves and, herding the cattle on to high ground, waited for the rain to give over.

Since the cattle could not be left completely unattended, Krishna and some of the gopas stayed with them.

"Hold up Govardhana over us, Krishna", the young ones laughed.

It rained for seven days and nights, and Nanda and his clan stayed on the hill of Govardhana, and were saved.

The story of Krishna holding up the hill of Govardhana is both extremely popular and well known.

It is a myth and legend which is practically a living reality, for it is a part of speech, metaphor and idiom. It is a part of the literature of nearly every language in India whether it is written poetry, spoken in bardic chanting, or folk songs. It is part of the art heritage of India, for nearly every school of painting has dealt with the subject.

Yet the inner meaning of the whole story is absolute metaphysics and the philosophy of India.

In the story, Krishna tells the gopas and the gopis to go into the caves. These caves are meant to symbolise what in the Upanishads is referred to as, "the cave of the heart where the Imperishable is, and where the yogis go every day".

So it can be said that, if perfect yoga is achieved, when one is safe in the "cave of the heart," the storm of anger from Indra, the lord of the senses and sensory organs, can have no effect. The yogi is safe.

The usual paintings of Krishna and the hill of Govardhana, show him holding up the hill with one finger.

An explanation of this is, that if the power of the Imperishable Krishna is absolute, then, whether it is one finger, or a whole body, or even a hundred thousand bodies, it is all totally meaningless, for there can be no parts of the Absolute Whole.

The picture remains: Govardhana is the "shelter" Krishna gives to those who have prayed for help with single-minded devotion and love.

The rain does not harm the gopas and gopis, and Indra's arrogance, that he would drown and flood out those who have acquired the sheltering power of Krishna's love, is humbled.

In the *Gita Govinda*, Jayadeva's great devotional poem, there is a verse depicting Indra laying his sapphire-encrusted, diademed head on Krishna's feet in humility. Indra, lord of the senses, acknowledges that Krishna's power of absolute love will always defeat even the king of the gods, and end all arrogance.

There are many stories about the humbling of Indra. One of these stories relates to the time just after Indra had hurled his thunderbolt and won a battle by killing an asura who was holding up the regeneration of the universe. So, Indra regained his heavenly kingdom and was once again king of the gods.

Indra was very happy and ordered the heavenly architect, Vishwakarma, to build more and more gorgeous palaces and marvels in the heavens. Every day a new order was

given, until poor Vishwakarma was so exhausted, that he hurried to Brahma to lay his case before him. Brahma promised to help. He went to Vishnu and explained the matter. Vishnu smiled and nodded his head.

Next day, a brahmin boy came to Indra's palace. Indra came himself to the outer doors to receive the boy. He brought him in, asked him to sit on a golden chair, gave him milk and honey and fruit, then asked what he, Indra, could do for him.

"I came to see your palace. Is it to be more wonderful than anything built by any other Indra, or other Vishwakarmas? And how many more years will it take to complete it?"

Indra smiled. Then with a superior, and what might be called, fatherly smile, he asked the brahmin boy. "Tell me, have there been many Indras before me, child? And have you heard of many Indras and Vishwakarmas?"

The child looked at Indra with his calm, wise eyes and, in a deep voice, said, "King of the gods, I have seen the dissolution of the universe. I have seen it all perish, again and again, at the end of every yuga-cycle. At that dreadful time every atom dissolves into the waters of eternity. Everything goes back into the fathomless infinity of the ocean. All is covered with utter darkness, empty of every sign of animate being. Who can number the passing ages of the world? Who can count the Indras that have come and gone?"

Just then a long procession of ants walked through Indra's hall. Orderly, marching in columns, the ants walked on and on.

The brahmin boy looked at them gravely, and then broke into peals of laughter. Shaken, Indra asked what was this, why was he laughing?

"This procession of ants is a procession of past Indras. Piety and great deeds elevate humans to these glorious realms,

or by wicked deeds, sink them into pits of pain and sorrow. It is only by deeds that one merits happiness or sorrow. It is by deeds one becomes an Indra. But Death administers the law of time. Perishable as bubbles are the endless cycles of countless rebirths."

The boy ended his appalling lesson and looked at Indra, who had been reduced to absolute insignificance.

After he left, it was a very thoughtful Indra who sent for Vishwakarma, thanked him, loaded him with gifts and sent him away.

The monsoons moved away and the seasons changed. The month of autumn approached. Soon it will be the night of the full moon, in the month of Kartika. The gopis hurried about their work, as the hours of daylight grew shorter.

"It is the loveliest full moon of the year and we should dance and dance."

"And all night long, with the sound of my flute," Krishna laughed.

"Will you also dance with Radha?" they teased.

"Yes, but Radha will be with me regardless of who I am dancing with. She lives in my thoughts constantly. When the dance is to be the Raas, Radha is the spirit of the Raas."

"Big words this Krishna has learnt, now he speaks poetry. If Radha means all that to him, get them married."

Someone brought two long garlands of flowers, the gopis surrounded Radha and Krishna and made them put these garlands round each other's neck. After that, Krishna stood with his feet crossed, playing the flute, wearing the garland of flowers Radha had put round his neck. Radha stood next to him with her arms round his shoulders wearing the garland Krishna had put round her. The gopis laughed, and said that

now Radha and Krishna's marriage was complete.

The days slipped by, the night of the full moon came and the girls were all indoors.

The flute started playing its plaintive call and the girls, some in the same house, some in their individual homes, said to themselves, "Now what?" How were they to escape, how were they to meet on that green grass in a flower encrusted clearing, by the banks of the Yamuna. That is where they had planned to meet. How were they to escape?

But they did. One by one, in groups, singly, by couples, the gopis fled to the river bank following the sound of Krishna's flute.

A strange glow seemed to surround that quiet, still place, where the only sound was the sound of Krishna's flute. The music poured from his lips just as the light from the moon poured silver on the river, the trees, the leaves, the river-bank, the flowering creepers and the night-flowering water-lilies.

Krishna was standing in his favourite pose, with his feet crossed and his head bent a little to one side. There was not a breath of air, nothing stirred, nothing moved. The gopis felt there was some unearthly quality in that scene, that light and the sound of the flute. There seemed not just one Krishna but four and then another, more and more till, around them, all they saw was Krishna with his flute.

Radha moved forward and walked up to Krishna, who looked at her with his eyes smiling in a glinting sideways glance. She leaned against him and sighed a small sigh of contentment. She felt she had come home, she was whole. This young Krishna and she, they belonged, each to the other. This night was strange, it had no beginning, no end.

The gopis began to sing. The young voices rose cool, soft, passionless, into the night air. They danced round and round,

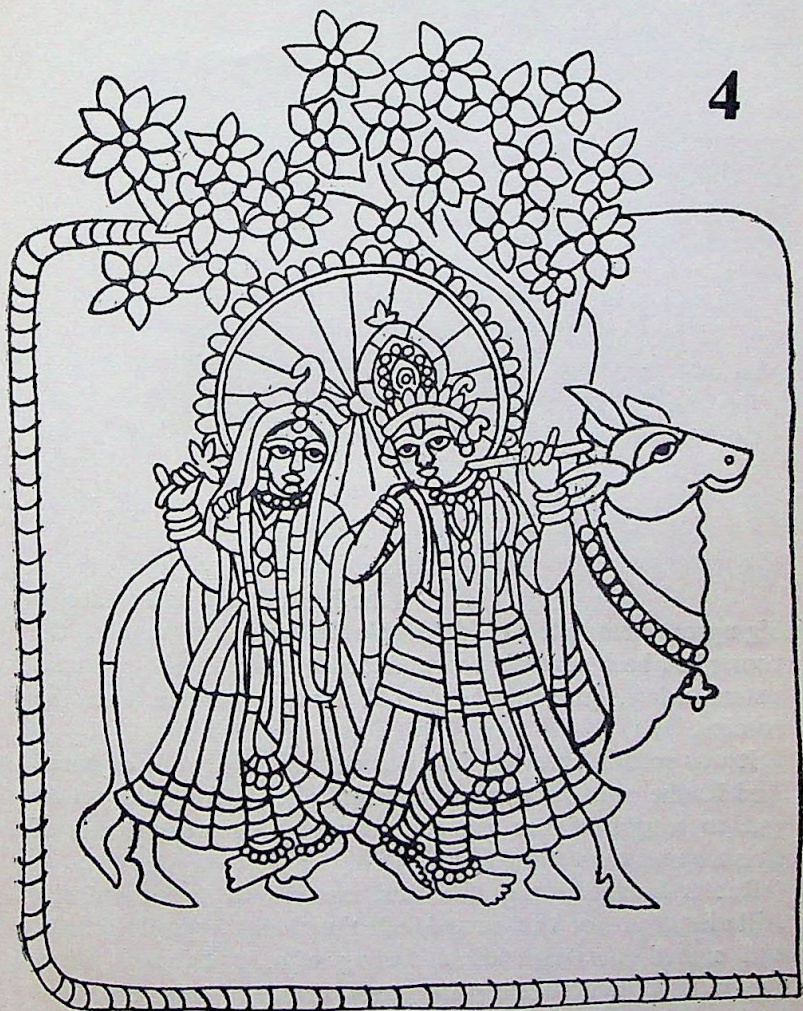
they danced clapping their hands, they danced gesturing as if they held small sticks they hit and clacked together. Round and about, the gopis danced, circling Radha and Krishna.

And Radha found herself praying—may this never end. As long as there is Vrindavana, may this Raas dance go on and on. As Krishna and I are together this night, may all lovers remember such a night as this. Whoever I might marry, and wherever Krishna might be, I am Krishna's and he is mine.

Slowly, languorously, she moved away from Krishna, she raised her arms and twirled about, her skirts belling out like a flower unfolding. Krishna tucked his flute into his waist-band and joined in the dance. Faster and faster the gopis, Radha and Krishna danced. In and out, round and about, Krishna seemed everywhere.

"He is dancing with me," each young gopi said to herself. "This night will never end. There will never be such a Raas again," they thought.

"As long as there is Vrindavana, Radha and Krishna will always be dancing together," Radha said to herself. "To this there is no beginning, no end."



The Raas dance had created a big uproar among the older people in Vrindavana, and the young had been severely reprimanded by their mothers, aunts, sisters-in-law, grandmothers, old servant women and the gossips.

It was scandalous. Krishna was getting totally out of hand. And Radha must be married immediately. That would put an end to a girl of her age countenancing the naughtiness of Krishna and the little gopis.

Radha laughed, and she was married to Ayaan but she still listened to the sound of the heart-beguiling flute, and sighed the sigh of a feeling of completeness when she was with Krishna. The gopis listened, crept out, kept assignations with Krishna. They filled their water pots at the river, or scoured out their milk pots, while Krishna played

his flute, or else pelted them with Kadamba flowers.

The girls used grown-up words to him saying that they were ruined, their names besmirched. Krishna laughed and turned away to tease another girl, weave together garlands of leaves and flowers and send them to Radha by some gopi. He would aim stones and break milk pots, he would tease his mother, he would turn everything upside down in her dairy rooms, eat up her butter and cream, and if Yashoda screamed at him for behaving ridiculously for a boy of his age, he would cajole her by putting his arms round her, smiling at her, kissing her, and she would be disarmed.

And then Krishna would be out again, bringing the cows home with the sound of his flute, at the hour when the dust raised by the returning animals turned gold as the sun set.

Yashoda would say to herself, he is in a blazing glory of light, my son, my little Krishna. Then someone would complain about some new mischief, some new naughtiness, some other way of teasing the gopis or the women of Nanda's clan.

Krishna had once again inveigled the gopis to bring Radha to a lovely clearing in the woods near the Yamuna. It was a beautiful night, with the moonlight softening the outlines of the trees. Krishna was playing on the flute, and the girls sitting or lying on the grass, gossiping and giggling. He told them a long and involved story about a dream he had, where Radha was the raja, the ruler, listening to complaints, while Krishna was her kotwal, or the chief police officer.

It was a wonderful game for the young ones. Radha had a piece of cloth tied on her head, a few peacock feathers were pushed in and Krishna stood, with a stick on his shoulder, guarding his king. The complaints and punishments were enormous fun and it all went on for some time, until Radha said she must go home now. Accompanied by her friend

Brinda, with Krishna acting guard and escort, Radha went home. The three of them went indoors.

Radha's sister-in-law had seen Radha leave the house, and went to see if she was with her mother-in-law. Not finding her there, she complained that Radha was always making excuses to go into the woods to pluck flowers, or to the river to fetch water, when all she really wanted was to meet Krishna on the sly.

The two women then hunted out Ayaan, Radha's husband, and complained about Radha.

"And if you catch that black boy, my son, beat him and if you find that useless daughter-in-law of mine flirting with that creature, drag her home by her hair. I am sick and tired of these girls running after that wicked flute-playing boy."

Nagged by his mother, Ayaan went home to first see if his wife was there.

As soon as Krishna heard Ayaan coming, he went and stood behind the image of the Goddess Kali, which Ayaan worshipped. Radha saw him walk into the room as if in a raging temper then, suddenly, Ayaan stood stock still looking at the image of Kali.

Ayaan did not see Krishna at all, all he saw was the image of Kali. She seemed to grow larger before his eyes, she seemed to glow. Ayaan loudly repeated prayers and hymns to Kali while Radha and Brinda gaped. Then Ayaan went away and Krishna came out from behind the image where he had been hiding.

Brinda said, "What happened?" and Radha answered, "I don't know. It seems he saw Krishna as Kali." Krishna looked at them, smiled and went home, pulling a blossoming branch down and playing his flute.

Radha went to bed and to sleep and then she had a dream. She dreamt that someone, in great anger, was scolding her.

All around her was a great emptiness, a terrible aloneness and she was falling. She fell and fell, then she was in an enormous ocean. In her dream she called, "Krishna, Krishna, help me," and Krishna came near but she could not touch him. He said, "I must go, my love. Sridama's curse must begin to work, the hundred years of separation is here. I am always with you but we must part." A terrible sound like something crashing surrounded her. Radha woke up with a start, her heart thudding. What was this dream? Was Krishna really going away? She could not understand any of it.

In Mathura, Kamsa slept in his gem-encrusted bed and had a nightmare. A terrible sound engulfed him. It was as if a thunderbolt had fallen near his head. He woke up with a start, his heart pounding, his mouth dry. He was awake yet he seemed to see a vision of horrors all around him. Dreadful figures with naked flashing swords seemed all around him, eerie figures seemed to be dancing around the room. He could not understand what was happening, he only knew he was afraid.

The next morning, when the court was assembled, he spoke to his Chief Priest. Kamsa explained his dream as best as he could. He said, "I cannot recover from the effect of that horrible dream. Advise me as to what should be done, to counter the ill effect of my nightmare and horrible vision."

The Chief Priest said that a Bow Yajna should be performed. It would be the death of any enemy he might have. "Invite all the neighbouring princes, call as many people as you can. This bow that we have is a famous bow and has been worshipped by many powerful people. Should anyone take up the challenge and break this bow, then certainly, some great calamity will come. Otherwise, this yajna will please Shiva and will have a beneficial and calming effect, and so, will

counteract any bad effect of your ill-omened dream.”

A few days later, Narada Muni came. Whenever he came anywhere, it was with a purpose. Whatever he said had both a purpose, and a fateful meaning.

He told Kamsa that Krishna and Balarama were the two who were going to kill him. “Vasudeva was frightened for you, and that is why he has had his two sons brought up by his friend Nanda. You have not been able to change the course of your fate.”

Kamsa in a raging temper pulled his sword out of the scabbard to kill Vasudeva, who was in Kamsa's court, but Narada Muni prevented it and stopped him, saying, “What good will that do? The children are living.”

Kamsa had Vasudeva and Devaki imprisoned. Handcuffed and in chains they were thrust into a dungeon.

When Narada Muni had left, Kamsa sent for another of his Daitya magicians, called Kesi, and told him to go to Vrindavana and kill Krishna. “Do what you like, but kill him.”

Kamsa sent for other people and ordered a games festival to be arranged. “Put up benches and platforms, arrange wrestling matches. Send invitations to Nanda and all the people of Braj. See that they come. It is said that Krishna and Balarama are to kill me. I am ordering you, my best wrestlers, Chamoor and Mushtika, to kill those two boys in a wrestling match. And my elephant, Kuvalyapida, is to be tied at the main entrance to the Games and, Elephant Driver, you are to see that the elephant crushes them to death. We shall also have the Bow Yajna, and to please Shiva, and for the success of our yajna, arrange that hundreds of fine animals be sacrificed.”

He next sent for Akrura, a senior Yadava and a very respected man. He was related to both Vasudeva and Kamsa. Kamsa asked him to sit near him, then he took Akrura's

hands between his own to beg a favour.

"I know you are my well-wisher, Akrura. You have always helped me. I want you to do something for me. You are my friend and I rely on you. Go to Braj and bring those two boys, Krishna and Balarama here. I am told that gods, or Vishnu himself, has decreed that those two will kill me. Bring them here soon, in fact, immediately, and I shall have them killed by my elephant Kuvalyapida, and there are my wrestlers, Chamoor and Mushtika as well. Bring Nanda and his whole clan too. Give him gifts and invite them to the Games. When they come, they too will be killed. I am telling you all this because you are my friend. Then there is that old father of mine. He still desires to rule but I intend to slash his and Devaka's heads off. After that, Akrura, we shall be free of all constraints and fears. I shall rule, and you shall be my companion and friend.

"Now you go and get those boys. Tell them to come for the Yajna and the Games. It should not be at all difficult to persuade them. After all, they are only boys."

Akrura said to Kamsa, that he understood Kamsa's wishes. "Man has many desires, he builds many bridges to cross over his difficulties but how shall he get over the fruits of his past actions? They, like the gods, stand in our way. However, I shall do as you ask me to do."

Akrura went to his own place and Kamsa went to the apartments of his queen.

Akrura was a devout man, religious minded and gentle. He had been asked by Kamsa to bring Krishna and Balarama to Mathura and he felt he must do his duty, according to the wishes of Kamsa, because he was a member of his court. He left for Vrindavana in his chariot and, when he reached Nanda's house, he was met and welcomed by him.

Offerings of fruit and flowers were placed before Akrura.

Nanda, with his hands joined in the gesture of humility, asked what had brought Akrura to his place.

Akrura told him that the Bow Yajna was being performed by Kamsa. "You have been told to attend. Krishna and Balarama are to come with me in my chariot." Then privately, Akrura spoke to Nanda. "Something must be done about Vasudeva and Devaki, but now you must all come with me."

That night Akrura stayed with Nanda. They had much to talk about. Nanda went away, after a while, to tell his household about their impending departure for Mathura.

When Nanda was busy, Krishna came and sat near Akrura. Then he asked, "Tell me all about our relations and friends, those connected by blood, marriage or clan. How are they? Your heart is pure, Uncle, tell me the true state of affairs."

Akrura told him about Vasudeva and Devaki, and how they had been imprisoned in chains. "Kamsa had wanted to kill Vasudeva but Narada Muni saved him. He is not safe, Krishna, Kamsa is plotting and planning to kill all the male Yadavas. Even you and Balarama. Though you have been asked ostensibly to the Yajna and the Games, in reality he plans to have you killed by his wrestlers, or by his executioner elephant."

Krishna sighed and then smiled. "Yes, I know now that Vasudeva and Devaki are my real parents. I know that their children were killed because of me. I know that Kamsa is the unremitting enemy of the Yadavas. Narada Muni has been to see me, as he has been to Kamsa."

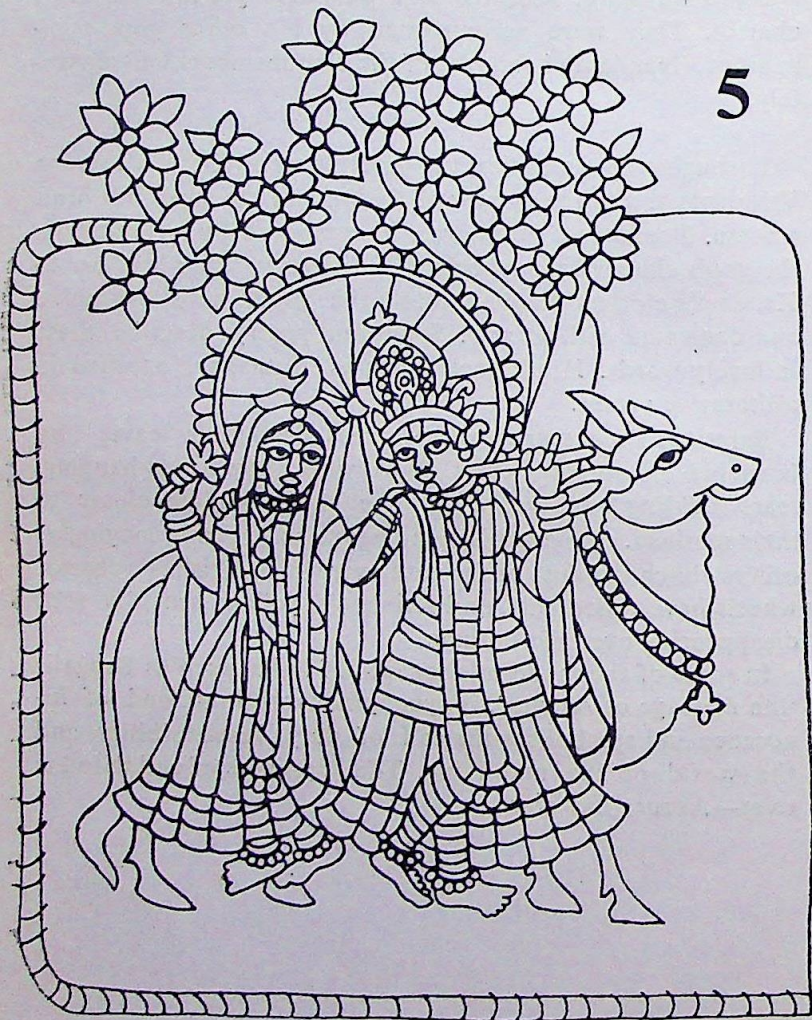
Laughing, Krishna called Balarama and together they talked the matter over with Nanda. Nanda then sent a message to the gopas, and to all the small outlying huts, hamlets and villages, that they had to go to Mathura. Kamsa had invited them, and as he was the overall clan-leader, they would have to attend the Bow Yajna and the Games.

Next morning, Krishna and Balarama got into Akrura's chariot. They were accompanied by ten other gopa companions. Nanda and the rest of the clan members left separately.

Through the centuries, the description of Krishna leaving Vrindavana, and the sorrow of Radha and the gopis has been written. Poems and songs are still composed by lyric writers: the gopis clutched the wheels of the chariot; they held on to Krishna's clothes; Radha fainted; the gopis were distracted and demented with sorrow. Songs and poetry describe these in lovely words. Hindi poets, such as Ratnakar, excelled in alliterative verses.

Paintings show scenes, where trees drop their leaves and branches in sorrow, cows stand with their heads hanging, tears trickling from their eyes. The calves huddle closer to their mothers. Some gopis stand, stone still, gazing longingly, others clutch the dust of the path over which Krishna's chariot wheels have rolled past, and Krishna's yellow scarf is seen disappearing over the horizon.

In some of the modern languages of India, such as Bengali, 'the message of Akrura', is synonymous with an end of innocence and symbolises the call of duty, responsibility and the world of life and living. The happiness of childhood is over—Akrura has come.



The departure of Krishna from Vrindavana was a total break and a new kind of life.

An enormous quantity of literature, a whole philosophy, is based on Krishna's life from his birth to the time of his departure from Vrindavana. The philosophy has been named the Bhakti cult—the cult of devotion to Krishna-Narayana-Vishnu.

The Bhagavata is the authority on which the Bhakti cult has been based. The Bhakti cult means not just devotion but metaphysical knowledge with devotion. Devotion to God is symbolised by the passion and yearning of the gopis, or sakhis, for the youthful Eternal Lover Krishna-Vasudeva.

The word Vasudeva means, One who dwells, lives, in the heart and body of everything.

Gopi means both the five senses and the five essential ele-

ments of the universe. Gopi also means, or is analogous with, the maturing human soul growing and craving for spiritual life.

Creation is the action and interaction of the elements. This is the Dance of the Gopis and the Lila of Krishna.

The forest of Vrindavana is the human heart, where the eternal meeting and love of the divine and human takes place. Vrindavana is also the transcendental experience of the yogis, using the yoga or meditation, and path of Bhakti or devotion.

The word Kama in ordinary uses means sex and sexuality. Yet the word Kama has another meaning, in the sense, that Kama is both creative force and creative consciousness. Kama is that creative force, and the creative consciousness, which makes the seed sprout, grow into a sapling and from a sapling to a tree with its flowers and fruit. It is what makes life progress. It is also the evolutionary force.

The subtler meaning of Kama is used in the Hindu marriage mantra.

Who gives this girl?

And to whom is she given?

Kama gives this girl,

And to Kama is given this girl.

Kama is the giver

Kama is the acceptor.

As the waves mingle into the sea

So they mingle into the ocean of Kama.

This aspect of Kama should also be understood to be the Sringara Rasa in poetry. Aesthetics of Sanskrit, or Hindu literature, says that this Kama and Sringara Rasa is happiness, which is the Kama of every living thing. It is the vital happiness which, when it transcends the hold of material

senses, becomes Ananda—the final goal of life. It is the birth-right of all that is created, for creation stems from happiness and Ananda.

Vaishnava literature uses certain technical terms, which have a meaning given by the Vaishnavas. Sringara Rasa is one of great subtlety but it can be simplified by taking the analogy of Indian musical terms. Every Raga has a form, described as the form ruling it. In the same way, every Rasa has a form and a deity ruling it. Rasa also has a colour. The Sringara Rasa has the colour of cloud-dark space, the form is Lord Krishna.

Jayadeva, who wrote the *Gita Govinda*, was one of a group of famous poets in the court of Lakshamana Sen of Bengal in the twelfth century. Though there have been great poems in Indian, and Hindu, literature, the *Gita Govinda* is an unsurpassed classic in its genre of poetry, philosophy and song.

The whole literature of the Bhakti movement of North India owes its debt to this work. Vidyapati wrote his lyrical songs inspired by this work. Chandidas and Chaitanya, or Sri Gauranga, as he is popularly called in Bengal, lived the subtleties found in the verses of Jayadeva's *Gita Govinda*. The tradition of the kirtanas, or the Padavali kirtans—devotional songs, carries on this tradition.

The main movement and stream of the Bhakti cult, where devotion and faith is given primacy over intellection, or intellectual understanding, comes from South India.

The tradition of faith and devotion was certainly always there, but periodically an interregnum of arid intellectual arguments, commentaries and hair-splitting by learned acharyas and scholars, has plagued the history of thinking, in India. It was while in a state of arguments, with the rites of Tantra reduced to, literally, bloody rituals, that Jayadeva's *Gita Govinda* brought Krishna, love and beauty back into

people's lives:

Again, when the Muslim rulers were bringing their puritan asceticism into Hindu life and living, and scholars argued on fine points of philosophy, that Chaitanya changed his own life, the life of the people of Bengal to begin with, and slowly Krishna, beauty, song and love spread among the people of India.

Chaitanya sang on roads and paths, in villages and towns. Singing of Krishna, and the redemption of love and devotion, he walked down the east coast to South India, back to the North as far as Vrindavana and changed the outlook of a people. His influence is still evident up to present times. For Chaitanya, there were no men and women, no high castes and low, no poor and rich. He sang of Krishna as Absolute love, of One contained within the many, and the many being at one with Krishna, because everything is Krishna.

The Vaishnava tradition, the Krishna tradition, still holds that, in the love of Krishna, we are all one.

Mirabai, a princess of Rajasthan, eventually walked the paths of Vrindavana singing her lovely songs of love for Krishna. In the South, Andal sang her songs of love and Krishna.

The history of Vaishnava literature, the tradition of certain words used lead to a fascinating journey into the genre of painting, and names of principalities where this type of painting originated. The clues can be found in the Padavali songs or kirtanas.

The Basohli school of Pahari paintings is fairly well known and is, also, one of the principalities known as Basohli. But the word Basohli is a corruption of a Bengali word, *basooli*, which is used over and over again in the Padavali kirtanas. It means, "We who are devoted to Vasudeva." This small principality, Basohli, in Himachal, which is today famous for

its paintings proclaims its devotion to Krishna-Vasudeva and so depicts the life of Krishna.

The Bhakti movement flows in a stream in which there are many schools. These are the Kabirpanthis, Bauls of Bengal and Bangladesh, Sikhs and the Padavali kirtanas. They have at their root the humanistic teaching of the Upanishads.

Jayadeva's *Gita Govinda* has a unique place in Indian literature, Sanskrit sacred literature and Vaishnava philosophy.

The *Gita Govinda* has been considered by many people to be merely a love poem filled with eroticism. Some see in it obscene pornography, and have depicted the moods contained in the verses in crude illustrations, with stress on sex and passion.

The *Gita Govinda* is a poem that takes the love of Radha and Krishna and describes it, and every phase of loving, in passionate detail. It is, of course, filled with the flavour of erotica. It is only the adult human who can fully appreciate this flavour, yet view these verses objectively.

The innate truth of the *Gita Govinda* is its metaphysical content. The whole poem merely covers this truth with an endless variety of moods and words, to state the great spiritual craving of each individual which searches for its completeness in the Ultimate, or Krishna.

There is a natural terrible human hunger which wants more and more but this, in the end, can only be satiated by Krishna.

The poem depicts the human figure, the delights of love and passion, and all the various ways Indian lovers react and behave. The way a woman dresses, the jewels she wears, the different flowers and perfumes she uses. Her behaviour in moments of passion, a description of her lassitude and dishevelment, it is all there in the *Gita Govinda*. There is wit

and wry mocking when Jayadeva says, "What lovely woman can be as a man," and goes on to describe the basic difference in the attitude of the woman when passion overwhelms her.

The style of the poem is Alankara, a highly stylised mode of poetic expression with emphasis on the desire for completion. The theme is Viraha-dukha, or the pain of separation in love. That is the theme and the story, the rest is pure poetry soaked in the sweetness of love. What is always remarkable about Jayadeva is the way he avoids a cloying sweetness by bringing a break in the mood, and a change in the manner of expression.

The *Gita Govinda* has twelve Sargas or abodes of love. Each Sarga describes the moods and expressions of love.

It should be remembered that Krishna is love incarnate. And Radha's name means "When I think of you, I am sheltered by you." From the point of philosophy, each human holds within it self Krishna, or the thought of God; the human is also sheltered by Krishna, so Radha is every human, or *jiva*. But the poetry of *Gita Govinda* never makes any issue of God and Soul, it is all Radha and Krishna. Only the occasional verses stress, or bring out the philosophical meaning.

To get an idea of the *Gita Govinda*, when the main poem begins, Jayadeva depicts the condition of Radha seeking her Krishna everywhere:

"In the hour of Spring,
When Time had enveloped Srimati's mind with the agony
of love,
She wandered bemused, lost, desperate with desire for the
beloved,
In the hidden woods of Vrindavana.
There, found by her companion, Srimati was told:

How shall I tell you how, today,
 On this lovely day of heart-rending Spring,
 Your beloved plays, sings, and dances with others.
 Listen, there it calls, it cries,
 From every reach of direction it comes:
 The sound of tears that whisper of separation,
 The separation that is a waking agony in the hearts
 Of the wedded whose loves
 Have gone to disparate lands."

To get an idea of the description of Spring, this is how the Sakhi describes it:

"Look upon this delicate day of Spring,
 all the woods, and all the forest is nothing but flowers,
 A golden sceptred land."

Except as a season, what is Spring? Again the Sakhi says:

"Spring, my dear, is the love of
 the innocent heart."

In the Fourth Sarga, this is how the Sakhis describe Radha's longing for him, to Krishna:

"Love's flames burn the body of Radha,
 Kesava, you are her only cure. . .
 The afflicted Srimati seeks cool
 Sandalwood, lotus blossoms and moonbeams
 But they burn,
 Everything burns and tortures her."

Then Jayadeva gives a sober ending to the mood:

“He, who to lighten the burdens of the world
Is the living form of Compassion,
May Sri Krishna be your safeguard,
In the hour of your need.”

The more passionate the verses and lines are, over and over again Jayadeva breaks the mood and ends with an invocation, or a blessing.

Radha says:

“Everywhere that flute of yours sounds
Ravishing the hearts of those who dare to listen,
And those who hear are doomed.”

Jayadeva ends the mood by saying:

“... the call of Krishna's flute,
Brings silence into the clatter
Of the household's commerce,
It is an unbreakable mantra,
The leap of joy in the hearts of the righteous.”

The Twelfth Sarga ends on a high note of passionate love when Krishna

“Locked in Radha's arms faints
Under the throat-strangling lassitude of love.”

This phrase, “throat-strangling” gives an indication to a certain condition, and phase, in Yoga which points to wisdom and spiritual knowledge. It is named after Saraswati, the goddess of Knowledge and Wisdom.

Radha, however, speaks lyrical poetry when she says:

“Paint my breasts with perfume and musk
And lave me with sandalwood paste,
Put around my hips
Golden girdles with bells that sing,
Twist garlands about my hair,
Dress me with blossoms,
Put upon my wrists bracelets of gold.”

Jayadeva ends with:

“May Sri Hari guard you and protect you.”

There is a story about the completion of a verse in the Tenth Sarga. The story is that Jayadeva, having written the first part was finding it impossible to write the end line. He was in a state of emotional stress. Over and over again, he asked his wife, Padmavati, what could he do? How could he bring it to the logical conclusion of the lines by which Krishna begs Radha to lay her feet on him.

Padmavati sent him off to the river to have his bath, saying, that after he had bathed, eaten and rested, it would all become clearer.

She was still busy in the kitchen, when she saw that Jayadeva had returned, much quicker than she had thought possible. However, she served his food. After that, Jayadeva asked her to bring the manuscript, and wrote on it the end lines, “dehi pada palava mudaram”, which completed the verse to now read:

“Give me your lovely feet to cool my burning breast
And be as a crown to adorn my head.”

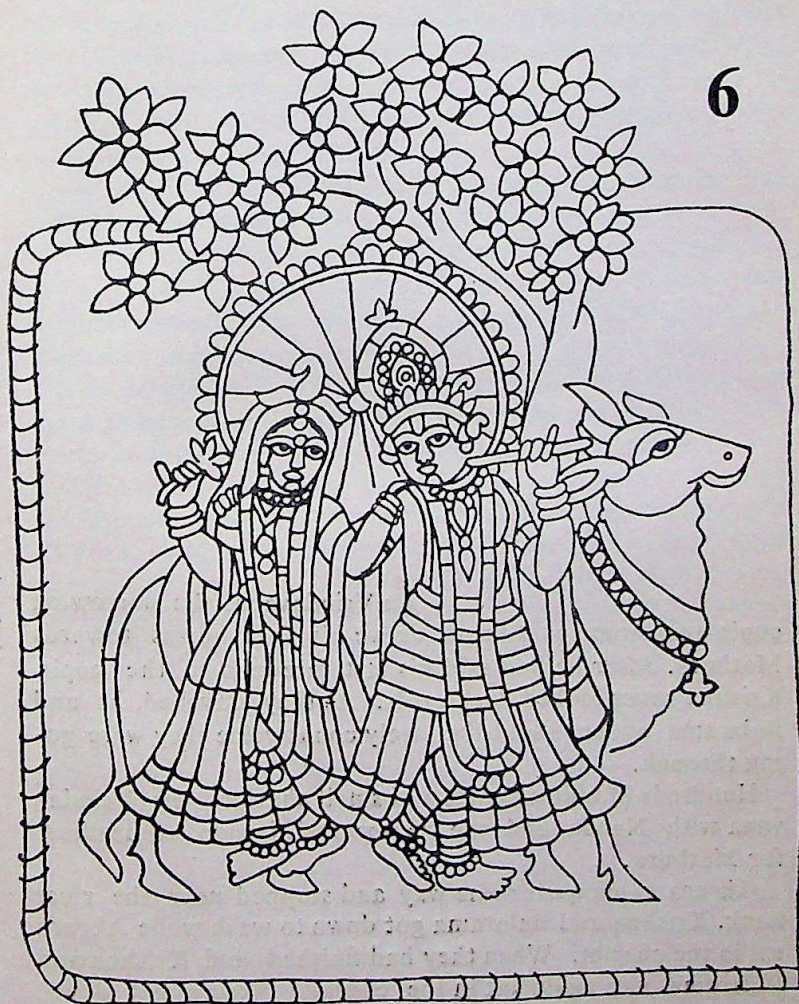
Then he went into the room where he normally rested, and shut the door.

Padmavati had hardly sat down to have her own food, when she heard footsteps outside, and then saw Jayadeva walk in, with a wet towel over his shoulder, as if he had just returned from the river.

She ran to the room, where the door was still shut, and on opening it found no one there, but the room was filled with the scent of sandalwood and lotus blossoms.

When she told Jayadeva what had happened, he was convinced that Krishna himself had come to complete the manuscript.

The explanation is very clear, but this story is still told whenever and wherever the *Gita Govinda* is sung or recited. In fact, the story is even better known than either the words of the verse, or the whole poem itself.



*I*n Vrindavana, the sorrowing gopis went home as Akrura drove his fast horses towards Mathura. After he had said his last farewells to the gopis, Krishna never looked backwards. As they travelled, he and Balarama spoke about the lovely countryside they were going through.

Hundreds of bullock carts and small chariots left Vrindavana with Nanda and the members of his clan, all heading for Mathura.

Akrura came quite some way and stopped near the river bank. Krishna and Balarama got down to wash while Akrura sat in the chariot. When they had finished and Krishna and Balarama once again sat in the chariot, Akrura got down, had his bath and said his ritual prayers.

Soon they reached the outskirts of Mathura. In a large

mango grove Nanda's people had laid out a camp for themselves. Krishna asked Akrura to stop and leave them here but Akrura protested, saying that they must come to Mathura town and stay with him. Krishna said, "I will come tomorrow, Uncle. Tonight I shall stay here. You go ahead, I shall meet you tomorrow."

Akrura went on to Mathura, told Kamsa that he had brought Krishna and Balarama and then went home.

Next morning, Krishna and Balarama, with some of their gopa friends, wandered into Mathura town. Krishna saw that the houses were beautiful, with gem-studded pillars and balconies. Highly polished floors could be seen through open doors, and courtyards paved with marble and different coloured stones. The roads were sprinkled and damped with scented water. Jars filled with water were before every front door, a small lamp lit to welcome gods and guests, rice and barley scattered for prosperity and garlands of leaves and flowers strung across the doorway. There were huge gates and *toranas* made of crystal and gold. There was a deep moat all round the city and an encircling defence wall made of copper and brass. There was a large town hall and the city looked well defended and prosperous.

As the young men walked down the road, the women in the town were very curious about them and came out to see them. Many of the women lost their hearts to Krishna, as he looked at them with a side glance and laughed.

As they reached another broad road, they saw a washerman coming with a large bundle of clothes. Krishna stopped him and asked whose clothes they were. When he learnt that they belonged to Kamsa, he said, "Hey, let me have some of those clothes to wear to the Games."

The washerman was furious, and arrogantly demanded of Krishna, who he thought he was, these clothes belonged to

Raja Kamsa, and he was the ruler's washerman, cowherd yokels better not get too big for their own good. He used all kinds of abusive words and snarled at Krishna.

At first Krishna listened to the tirade in amusement, but when the washerman's language became positively offensive, he slapped him hard.

No sooner had Krishna slapped him, than the washerman fell down and, the *Bhagavata* says, "His head fell off." The washerman's workers howled in terror and ran away as fast as they could.

Krishna looked at the washerman, then he opened the bundle of clothes and helped himself to whatever he wanted. Balarama did the same, and they told the gopas to also take what they wanted. They left the rest of the clothes where they were, in the bundle lying on the road by the side of the dead washerman, and walked on.

They then saw a tailor with a lot of scarves and other clothes heaped on his stall. The tailor got up when he saw Krishna and Balarama. He said, "What can I do for you, young gentlemen? Is there any way in which I can be of help?"

Krishna said he felt that the clothes he was wearing were not quite complete, so could he help him, and his friend, look tidier and smarter. The tailor brought some scarves, draped these round them and showed them the correct way to tie the string of their robes.

A little further on they met a flower-seller and this man gave them beautiful garlands to put round their necks and also gave them scented spices and betel nuts to chew.

Feeling very smart and like town-saunterers, the boys were laughing among themselves when they saw a hunchbacked and crippled woman walking ahead of them. As they were passing her, Krishna looked at her, smiled and asked what she had on her small tray.

“There is sandalwood paste here, my prince, aloes and scents to please the most fastidious. I supply sandalwood paste and scents to Raja Kamsa. Would you like some? Come, I shall put this paste and scents on you.”

Krishna and Balarama stood, while she put the paste and scents on them. The girl had a pretty face, but that poor crooked body made her look very ugly. Krishna looked at her compassionately, put his hand under her chin and lifted her face. The girl felt tall, straight and lovely. Tears rose to her eyes, she smiled back and lost her heart to Krishna's deep, dark, smiling eyes.

Kubja, the hunchbacked, remained where she was, looking at the boys as they walked away.

Krishna saw a lot of people all walking in one direction. He asked where they were going and when they told him, to the Yajna, he said, “Of course! We too want to go there.”

The Yajna Hall was a temporary structure but beautifully decorated. The bow was on a raised platform. It was covered with jewels, loose gems, flowers, fruits and sandalwood powder. It was flanked by gold incense burners. Guards stood at the corners of the Hall. The people were going up to pay homage to the great bow, symbolising the power, courage, bravery and authority of Kamsa's rule.

Krishna went up to the platform, looked at the bow, picked it up, strung it and pulled the string so taut that the bow snapped. He did it with the ease of snapping a length of sugar cane but the crack of the bow breaking was sharp and loud. The guards were stupefied with horror. They could not have imagined that anybody would have the temerity to even touch the bow, leave alone break it. By the time they realised the full import and horror of the situation, Krishna had walked away through the milling, gesticulating, arguing crowd that had gathered round as soon as Krishna broke the bow.

The news reached Kamsa, and Kamsa was afraid. The portents were evil, but tomorrow there would be the Games, his wrestlers and his executioner elephant.

Next day, very early, the drums began to sound, calling the people to come to the Games. Town-criers were out rousing the citizens, calling the villagers, calling and summoning Nanda and his people.

A stream of people surged towards the amphitheatre built for the Games. The important citizens sat in the places allotted to them. The women sat in the enclosure meant for them. Kamsa came and sat on his throne, surrounded by the smaller chiefs and his courtiers.

Nanda came up with his gifts to Kamsa, and then asked permission to go and sit with his people.

Krishna and Balarama were late getting ready, so they had not come with Nanda. They arrived later, just as the drums began to beat again for the wrestling matches to begin. The musicians shrilled their festive welcoming notices on their instruments. There was a deep hum of noise, for everyone was talking and the villagers, with their women and children, jostled about in an outer enclosure. Krishna and Balarama reached the gates of the Games, and found their way blocked by an elephant.

"Hey, Driver, get that elephant of yours out of the way. We have to get to the Games."

The driver-mahaut turned his elephant, hit it with the goad to enrage it, and then instructed the elephant to pick Krishna up in his trunk.

The elephant picked Krishna up, but Krishna managed to wriggle away and got under the elephant, just behind his front legs. Then there began a battle of wits between the elephant and Krishna. Try as he could, the mahaut-driver could not get the elephant to kill Krishna. Eventually it was Krishna

who killed the elephant. After cutting and hauling those enormous tusks out, Krishna and Balarama walked into the wrestling arena.

Krishna was covered with the blood of the elephant, wet with perspiration but still the women murmured at his charm and beauty; the men smiled in pleasure and children gaped.

When Krishna and Balarama came in, Kamsa scowled, looked a little more murderous, and signed to Chanoor.

Chanoor challenged Krishna to fight out a match with him, but Krishna demurred saying, "After all, I am only a boy, you should challenge someone of your own experience."

Chanoor said, "I don't know how you can be excused, because of being a boy, since you have just killed the elephant Kuvalyapida."

Chanoor fought with Krishna, and Mushtika with Balarama. These men were huge and strong, muscle-bound and tough. Krishna's slim blue body looked like a monsoon cloud against that mountain of flesh, and Balarama, the white mist of the morning hour against the rough rock of Mushtika's body.

They slapped each other, they hit, they struggled, they panted, they hit each other with fists, they pummelled, they picked each other up, and they flung each other down.

The women began to murmur, "This is grossly unfair. They are boys and the king should not allow it. Yet he sits there and watches *adharma*. We cannot sit here and be witness to such wrongs. Let us get up and go. To watch this *adharma* is to be partner to the king's evil and sin. Let us go."

As Chanoor was fighting Krishna, hitting him and being pummelled in return, he kept feeling a distaste, a lassitude, and a pouring away of his strength. He should have been able to kill this boy so easily and yet he could not, there was no more strength left in him. After a particularly rough

wrench and twist, Chanoor fell on the pad, gasped for air and fell back dead.

Balarama hit Mushtika as hard as he could, Mushtika vomitted blood and fell forward, dead in his own foulness. Then Balarama took on Koota as he rushed forward, hit him with his joined hand-clasp and killed him.

Krishna took on Shala and after a tremendous fight killed him too, then when Toshala came at him, he attacked with terrible fierceness and tore him apart into two pieces.

Seeing this horrendous fight, the rest of the killer-wrestlers fled the arena.

Kamsa watched and saw the end of all his plans. His face grew dark with rage. His orders rang out, "Take those two boys and throw them out of my city. Confiscate the belongings of all the gopa families and imprison Nanda. Go, kill Vasudeva, and that fool father of mine, Ugrasena, kill him too."

As Kamsa gave these orders, Krishna ran up to the king's raised dais and jumped on to it. When Kamsa found that his predicted mortal enemy was before him, he pulled out his sword and slashed at Krishna. He slashed to the right, to the left, [but Krishna was not there. As he turned round, Kamsa's gem-studded diadem fell from his head. Krishna leapt forward and, catching Kamsa by his loose hair, flung him down from the dais into the wrestling arena. Then he took another leap and landed straight on Kamsa. As he landed on him, Kamsa choked, gasped and died. Then Krishna dragged his body around the arena, flung him down, and looked at him as a lion would look at his victim after killing it.

Kamsa had eight other brothers who rushed forward to kill Krishna, but it was now too late. The much oppressed Yadavas had seen their oppressor killed and they rose against Kamsa's brothers and his soldiers. In the melee, the riot and

the fighting, Kamsa's brothers were killed.

The widows of Kamsa, and his brothers, came out into the arena weeping, and threw themselves on the body of their dead kinsmen. Mourning, they cried and bewailed their fate.

Krishna came and helped them up and made them return to their own apartments. Kamsa's last funeral rites were completed, and then Ugrasena was put back on the throne his son, Kamsa, had usurped.

Krishna and Balarama hurried to the prison where Vasudeva and Devaki were imprisoned. Krishna undid the manacles on their hands, took off their chains and humbly held their feet in his hands. "How much you have suffered because of me."

For some time, Vasudeva and Devaki had stood stupefied as Krishna and Balarama knelt at their feet. Then, at last, the ocean of tears the years had collected and locked inside Devaki, began to creep out from beneath her eyelids.

She pulled Krishna into her arms and putting her cheek on his head cried and cried, while Nanda stroked Krishna, Balarama and Devaki by turns. He smiled, he patted and stroked their backs, and smoothed their hair, as Devaki's tears drenched Krishna's head.

In a voice thick with tears, and in an agony of emotions too great to fully express, Devaki said, "And will you go away, go back to your Vrindavana again? Will I never see you, again, after this?"

Krishna kept silent for a moment, then said, "No. The Shastras have said that a son must look after his father and mother. And the mother is the greatest responsibility and there is no greater friend than a mother. To desert one's mother is to sin against love. I will not leave you."

Devaki's tears had eased her heart and Krishna's words were a further solace.

Next day, Vasudeva, Krishna and Balarama gave gifts to Brahmins and the poor. Priests chanted prayers for peace in the skies and on earth. They said Shantih to birds and beasts, and peace to all that exists. Let rages and angers be quiet, they said.

After some days, when the celebrations of Ugrasena again taking over the reins of government were over, the Brahmins had been given gifts and they had gone, Nanda spoke to Krishna. "It is all over now, Krishna. Let us go home. This city is beautiful but it is time we went back to Vrindavana."

It was a difficult and a sad thing Krishna had to do, when he had to tell Nanda, that he would not be going back to Vrindavana. "I have loved you as my father, but you know the truth. I cannot go back. This is now my place. The future is full of responsibilities and duties for me."

Nanda was aghast. "What are you telling me? You will not go back? What shall I tell your mother, Yashoda—how shall I explain?" and he burst into tears.

There really was nothing for Krishna to say. Yet he said, "You must explain matters to her. You must console her. Do not let her grieve herself into melancholy," he pleaded.

Nanda pleaded in return, "Come back just once. Tell her yourself. Console her and then come back." But Krishna said no, it cannot be. There is no going back now. His life with Nanda, Yashoda, and those days of irresponsible boyhood, were over.

Grieving, sad, yet understanding the inevitability of the immediate situation, Nanda left. Even when he was leaving, Nanda pleaded once more. Krishna said, "I cannot go back, I can only meet them in their dreams."

Krishna embraced his gopa friends goodbye and whispered. "Tell the gopis to remember me always, tell them to take care of Radha."

After Kamsa's death, messengers and heralds went far and wide giving the news to the scattered Yadavas. They told them to return to Mathura and take back their lands and possessions, all of which they had to leave when they fled the land to escape from Kamsa's oppressive rule. The Yadava clans of Vrishni, Andhaka, Madhu, Dasarha and Kookoora came streaming back from their self-exiled life. The countryside was resettled. The little hamlets with their neglected fields were inhabited again. The fruit trees bore fruit, the grass grew, everything grew green, and the confiscated cattle grazed on their owners' pastures again. Earth-Prithvi was a smiling delight to the eyes.

One day, the Yadavas' traditional priest, Gargacharya, arrived in Mathura. Vasudeva and Devaki welcomed him with all the usual courtesies, asked about his welfare and did everything to please this quiet, gentle Muni. Vasudeva called Krishna and Balarama and the old man blessed them. Vasudeva said that both Krishna and Balarama had yet to have their Upanayana, the Sacred Thread ceremony. Only after they were invested with this, could they begin their studies under a guru.

Gargacharya calculated the position of stars and planets, the auspicious and correct time. He said in two days it would be the right day, and so Vasudeva better send out the invitations, and collect all the necessities for the ceremony, the feasts and celebrations.

A tremendous activity began as Devaki turned to the domestic arrangements, and Vasudeva sent messengers to various relations and chiefs in the surrounding countryside.

The Puranas say: what a crowd turned up, what gifts were given and how beautifully Gargacharya sang out the sacred words: To see Krishna, Narayana himself, being invested with the Yajnopavita, the Sacred Thread worn by the gods.

and those entitled to study the Vedas, all the ancient rishis, munis, and the very gods themselves, came. Shiva came, and Durga on her lion. Drums beat in the heavens, and flowers showered down from the skies.

Krishna and Balarama learnt the ancient mantras. They were given the rod to denote the disciplined mind, they had their foreheads marked by a streak of white sandal paste to denote that wisdom is the third eye. They took the vows of celibacy to study the Vedas and the Sixty-four Subjects of Learning. Only after their learning was completed, and their Guru considered them as having learnt everything, and gave them permission to leave, could they enter the life of a householder. Till then, they must be brahmacharis, with the behaviour and life of a student: study, learning and celibacy of and by thought, behaviour and action.

Soon after, Krishna and Balarama left for Avanti to study under the brilliant teacher, Rishi Sandipani.

Both Krishna and Balarama were exemplary students. They studied with great dilligence, and their natural level of intelligence was so high that they learnt as fast as their Guru taught. He had only to teach them something and they were immediately word perfect. They behaved with great consideration and respect for their teacher.

He taught them the six parts of sacred learning, the Upanishads and the complete Vedas. Then he taught them the art of archery, where certain mantras were said before loosing various kinds of arrows. They learnt the Manu Smriti and Dharma Shashtra, which lays down the laws, rules and ceremonies to be observed by Hindus from birth to death. They learnt all the different methods and schools of philosophy. Then the arts and science of government and diplomacy. Finally, they learnt the rest of the Sixty-four Subjects.

Krishna became an expert bowman and excelled in his own particular weapon of the Chakra, or Discus—a whirling wheel with a cutting edge, that flew from his hand like lightning and returned, back into his hand.

Balarama became an expert in wrestling, and fighting with a mace, but his own particular weapon, with which he was a fearsome warrior, was a Hala, or a weapon shaped like a ploughshare. He was a giant of a man with enormous strength. Under Guru Sandipani's care, he also became the "Haladhara", the man with his senses completely under control.

Then their learning, their days of study and practice with weapons, was over. Their Guru said he was pleased.

Krishna and Balarama stood before their Guru and said as Guru-dakshina, or their final fee to their Guru, what could they give him? Whatever he asked for, or whatever they were told to do, they would be honoured to do for their Guru.

Sandipani said, "What can I ask you to give me! All I want is my only child to be given back to me."

His son had gone to Pravasa, near the sea, and there he had been drowned.

"Give me back my son. There is no other fee I can ask for."

Krishna and Balarama bowed before their Guru and left.

The Puranas say Krishna and Balarama went to Pravasa and there summoned the god of the Oceans, and when he rose out of the waters, demanded back Sandipani's son. Ocean said that an anti-god, an asura, like a conch-shell may have taken him. He went down to look for him and returned to say that Sandipani's son was not there. Eventually, Krishna went to Yama, the ruler of Death, and asked for the boy and Yama handed him back.

Krishna brought him and gave him back to Sandipani Guru, and then returned to Mathura.

In the whole of Krishna's life there are only two "miracles". Both times it is a life being given back. One is Sandipani's son, and the other is when he saves Arjuna's still-born grandson.

Actually, the rescue of Sandipani's son, by Krishna, is to point to a moral. This moral is that whatever the guru asks for, particularly when he asks for his final fee, it must be given him—even if it means going to the kingdom of Yama, to rescue his child.

"Krishna brought back his Guru Sandipani's child", and the rest of the story fits in beautifully, to point out this moral. Every other incident, such as fights with anti-gods, serpents, or an elephant, is explainable because it is allegorical.

There is nothing particularly miraculous, in Krishna and Balarama winning the wrestling match, against the expert wrestlers. Even today, wrestling is the normal game and hobby of the boys in that particular area of India. Right from babyhood, boys roll and tumble on the sands, wrestling, and later learn under the village master-wrestler, or Ustad.

Krishna was young, agile and had far greater stamina. One need not really attribute unnecessary miracles to Krishna, but that he was outstanding, in one way or the other, remains obvious.

As for his charm and personality, or his heart-beguiling smile, if Krishna is accepted as being the complete totality of Consciousness, or Conscious Self, then he has also to have the complete totality of charm. A young man, a grown man, a highly educated prince with totality of intelligence and charm, is a totally devastating conception from every woman's point of view, be she gopi, town woman, hunchback, Radha

or the princesses who came to hear of Krishna, or to see him.

After Krishna returned from Avanti, he asked his great friend, Uddhava, to go to Vrindavana and see how Nanda and Yashoda were. He sent loving messages and words of advice, but he did not go himself.

When Uddhava reached Vrindavana, he saw that Yashoda was still grieving for Krishna, but she welcomed him as if Uddhava was Krishna himself.

Yashoda said, "Let him be happy where he is. He has never come back and I have so longed for him. But once he came in a dream. He was once again my lovely little baby child. He again crawled into my arms, he broke the milk pots, he stole butter and curds, he fed the monkeys with the hoarded cream. He turned the whole place upside down once again and went away. Gargacharya has told me everything, but, to me, he will remain my little son. You say he has asked if there is anything he can gift me. Yes, tell him, since he is the Lord of Existence and can gift anything, then I wish to be gifted a round of lives when I can return over and over again to Vrindavana, and remember Krishna. I want no other gift."

The gopis, grown girls now, said they remembered Krishna every day and moment of their lives. Radha smiled, "Krishna? Who can forget Krishna? Garga Muni says, Krishna is everywhere. Tell Krishna I always remember him. He came to me once, soon after he left, in a dream. It was a strange dream. There was an unearthly light about him and me, and we danced the Raas dance the whole night through. You see those trees, that garden? How will they forget Krishna and the sound of his flute? As long as there is Vrindavana, trees and gardens, Krishna's flute will sound, and on some dream-filled night of the full moon, Radha and the gopis will dance

with Krishna."

Uddhava returned to Mathura and told Krishna about the people in Vrindavana, and what they had said.

Krishna was now taking part in the diplomacy and diplomatic relations of the Yadava confederacy with other neighbouring rulers.

Vasudeva's sister, Kunti, had been married to Pandu of the Kuru-Panchala kingdom. Pandu's elder brother, Dhritarashtra, was blind and Pandu was the real ruler. But Pandu gave up the kingdom, went into the forest with his two queens and there he died. His second queen had burnt herself on his funeral pyre but his first wife, Kunti, Krishna's aunt, had returned to Dhritarashtra's court. She lived there, from the time her husband died, with her own three sons and the twin boys of her co-wife.

Reports had come that Pandu's sons were not being treated fairly. Dhritarashtra was doing things to favour his own sons against the interests of his nephews.

Krishna went to Akrura's house one day, and asked him to go to Hastinapur, to see and judge if the reports were true and correct. A message had come from Hastinapur, too, and it had been decided that Akrura was the best person to go.

When Akrura reached Hastinapur, he spoke to Kunti, watched, judged and, before he left, he spoke in open court to Dhritarashtra. He pointed out that, though he was holding the whole kingdom now, Pandu's half of the kingdom should be regarded as in trust, till the Pandava brothers, the sons of Pandu, were old enough to take over.

"Nothing lasts, King, except one's dharma and one's good name. Time takes away wives and sons. For their sakes, men forget that dharma is more important than giving into the desires of wives and sons. You are wise, King Dhritarashtra,

do not do anything which is against dharma.” Dhritarashtra gave a sophist's answer with flowery words, all totally meaningless. Akrura then went back to Mathura, and reported that the situation did not look at all good to him.

After Akrura returns from Hastinapur, the enormous canvas of the Mahabharata, the quarrel between Dhritarashtra's sons and the Pandavas, the great battle of Kurukshetra, waits for Krishna as a brooding tragedy of the future.

Krishna did not meet the Pandavas till Draupadi's swayamvara took place, and he did not really enter the scene of the Mahabharata till then.

Kamsa's two widows were both daughters of Jarasandha, the powerful ruler of Magadha. His influence spread eastward, and his allies were fierce and ruthless warriors. After Krishna killed Kamsa, the two widowed queens returned to their father's country to live under his protection. These two queens brooded over the loss of their husband, his country, their wealth and their position. They brooded and longed for revenge on the Yadavas.

Eventually Jarasandha, too, felt that the Yadavas should be punished for daring to kill his son-in-law. There was also the political feature. Kamsa, his son-in-law, by being in Mathura, guarded Jarasandha's western borders as a friendly power. Today the Yadavas, from being unimportant scattered clans, were becoming powerful, strong and consolidating their position. They now had both Kamsa's territory and wealth in their hands. They had a number of wise counsellors who kept their tribes quiet and together.

Jarasandha decided to attack. A vast army marched towards Mathura.

Krishna and Balarama led a smaller and therefore, probab-

ly, a more compact and manoeuvrable force. A tremendous battle took place and Balarama captured Jarasandha alive. He was going to kill him, but was prevented from doing so by Krishna.

The Puranas impute Krishna's action as being his divine plan to induce Jarasandha to attack again, so that the cruel, ruthless, violent men, fighting for Jarasandha, would be killed, and the burden of Prithvi-Earth lightened.

Looking at it from a purely practical basis, by capturing and then releasing Jarasandha, Krishna humiliated the king, and broke down his morale by allowing him to live. By the standards of the time, Jarasandha might as well have died than be left alive through the generosity of Krishna and the Yadavas.

Krishna also knew that by killing Jarasandha, the immediate danger from the kingdom of Magadha was not over. They, the Magadhans, could attack again immediately, and the Yadavas were not yet sufficiently organised to fight and win.

Through the succeeding years, Jarasandha attacked Mathura and the Yadavas, seventeen times.

Krishna and Balarama were wonderful warriors, they had extraordinary and magnificent weapons, and among the Yadavas there were any number of superb warriors. But, as Krishna was to confess and tell the Pandava King, Yudhishthira, one day in the far future, the Yadavas were now convinced that they could not defeat Jarasandha. "Even if we had fought for three hundred years, we could not have defeated him," were Krishna's words.

Something had to be done. Krishna went westward as far as he could and reached the sea. There, on an island, he visualised the future capital of the Yadavas—Dwarka. Coming further inland, he saw where fortresses could be built and

how, by outer encircling rings of defensive posts, he could guard the approaches to Dwarka.

News came that the eighteenth attack by Jarasandha was imminent. The army was so vast that it was like the rippling tide of the ocean heading to swallow Mathura.

Krishna made elaborate plans to save his people. He sent Vasudeva, Ugrasena the King, the older people, women and children westward. Mathura was to be totally evacuated, so that, when Jarasandha came, there was nothing upon which to vent his rage. But it was more than likely he would be so furious, that he would delay pursuing the Yadavas, and vent his rage on the empty city. And this is exactly what did happen. Jarasandha was known to be a vengeful and impetuous man. He was apt to be carried away by emotions when he was enraged. Krishna was very shrewd in his summing up of people, and he played on Jarasandha's weaknesses.

Krishna and Balarama hung around near Mathura, with a train of men and animals loaded with coins, treasures and jewellery.

The main body of the Yadavas was still streaming west. They were not yet safe in their new island city, so Krishna caused a military diversion by pretending to be the main force carrying the treasury. On seeing this army, Jarasandha's vast strength fell on the treasures, and Krishna pretended to act frightened. Leaving the treasures, he fled in a northern direction. An enemy running away had to be challenged, and the more Jarasandha challenged them to stop, the more Krishna and his army acted confused, afraid, and retreated. Somewhere, the army and Krishna parted, and Krishna inveigled Jarasandha near a rocky hill. Krishna disappeared into the ravines, defiles and caves that he knew well. Jarasandha's patrols hunted Krishna and Balarama, and unable to find them, they surrounded the hill and set the whole hill on fire.

Scrambling down rocks, cliffs, and through ravines that they had already reconnoitred well, Krishna and Balarama escaped.

Jarasandha stood and laughed at two foolish young Yadavas trying to escape from his hands. Fully convinced that these two had been burnt to death in the raging fire, he went back to Magadha and forgot about the Yadavas.

To the end, until he was killed, Jarasandha remained a menace to all honourable rulers, and Krishna looked upon him as a danger and an anti-god, because of his ways and outlook.

After the Yadavas had settled down in Dwarka, and were fully organized as a competent fighting force, Krishna's life's as an advisor, a great warrior and a prince whose fame spread to every country, began.

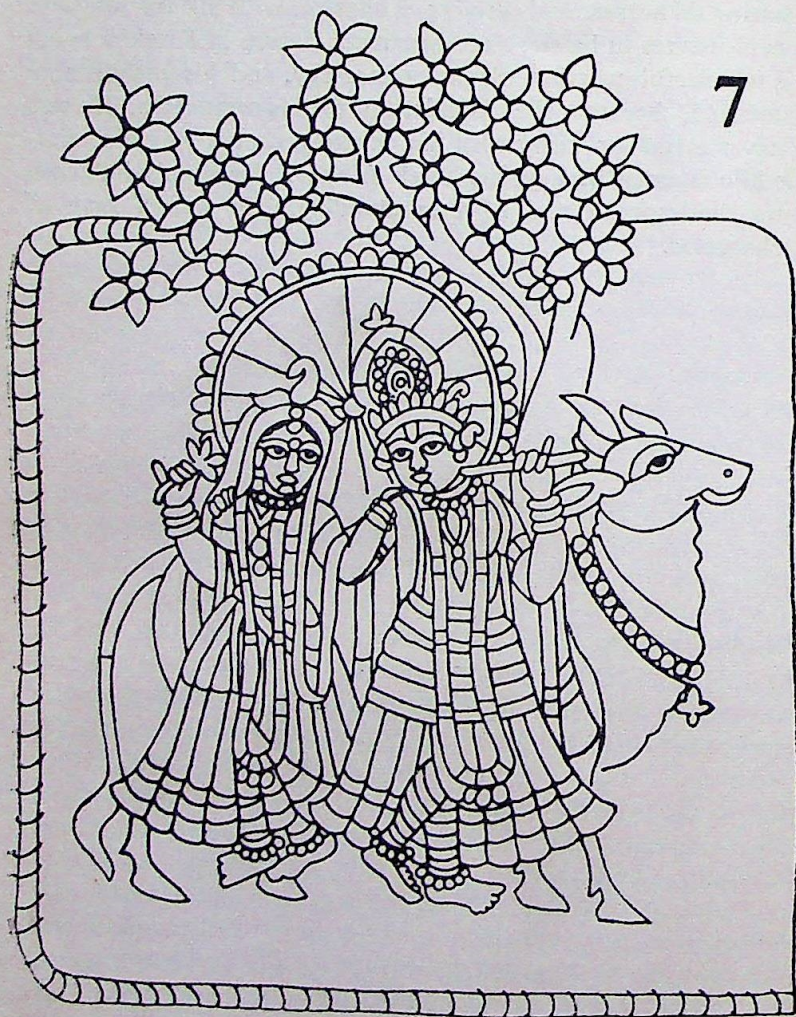
Ugrasena, the King, wanted to do the Rajasuya Yajna and gain sovereign, or imperial, status.

The Yadavas looked upon Krishna as their leader. They had asked him to become their king but he had refused. All through his life, Krishna remained the non-king, with all the prestige and reputation of being the leader of the Yadavas.

Before this Rajasuya Yajna could be done, all the neighbouring principalities and kingdoms had to accept suzerainty and also give tribute. These royal yajnas required enormous wealth which had to be acquired through tribute. This wealth was distributed after the yajna, but it first had to be acquired.

It was in preparation of this yajna that Krishna had to fight endless battles, all over Asia and beyond, far into the north. It was during this phase of his life that he acquired his reputation of being invincible in battle. He had a magnificent bow made of horn, which only he, Balarama and Arjuna could ever bend and string. His Chakra became his terrible weapon. His knowledge of animals, horses, training and

caring of horses, and driving a chariot, with all its intricate manoeuvres in battle, also became a feature of Krishna being a wonderful warrior. Sagacity, strategy, and his unshakeable courage, became the foundation for his reputation. He was never mean or petty with his enemies, that is why his erst-while enemies became his loyal friends. Krishna's influence was widespread and of firm standing. He was a man of character.



*D*warka was a beautiful city, laid out according to the Shashtra of city planning, handed down from generation to generation of architects and builders. The special feature of Dwarka and its surroundings were its wide-spread parks and gardens. There, on the sea coast and on the island itself, everything looked green and pleasant. Many of the houses were gilded with a covering of gold plating, and the spires and towers were of gold. Crystal was used to decorate the huge gateways, and brass for small balconies.

People of all the different castes lived together in the city. There were no separate areas for different strata of society and social living.

Krishna treated everyone alike, and everyone lived together in happiness.

Dwarka, and the Yadava confederacy, was something uni-

que for those times. Krishna's views on life, on people, his behaviour towards those who turned to him for help, was always compassionate, kind and full of understanding. This did not please all the other rulers and he had some bitter enemies. Even Balarama, on occasions, was exasperated by Krishna's attitude of extreme tolerance towards those who gave him their love or loyalty.

Krishna consolidated the Yadava power by diplomacy or war. His fame in learning diplomacy and the strategies of war, or friendship with other rulers, made him and the Yadavas a formidable force.

His pleasant personality, and charm of looks and manner, were spoken of from place to place, and from one ruler's court to another. Just as the men talked about him in open court, the gossips carried these stories to the women's apartments.

Rukmini, daughter of Vishmaka, ruler of Vidarbha, also heard of Krishna. The more she heard of him, the more her imagination became filled with thoughts of Krishna. She could think of no one she would like to marry more than Krishna.

Rukmini was in that nubile state, which is that delicate stage of change from girlhood to woman. Her loveliness was talked about in every court. Krishna, too, had heard of her, and was wondering whether she would not be the perfect wife, as he was now thinking of getting married. Rukmini's father was also thinking of approaching Krishna, but her brother, Rukmi, was bitterly antagonistic towards him. He called Krishna "that herder of cattle, who has become rich and powerful, hiding on his island." Rukmi wanted his sister to marry Sishupala, commander of Jarasandha's forces. King Vishmaka was not at all happy about this alliance but gave in to Rukmi, and agreed.

Rukmi invited Sishupala to marry his sister, and Rukmini

was informed about her impending marriage.

Rukmini was in despair. She thought, she prayed, then she calmed herself and worked out a plan. She sent for a Brahmin who was attached to the palace for minor priestly work, and for carrying messages. She swore him to secrecy, told him her problem and asked him to take a message to Krishna. He memorised the text of the message and set out for Dwarka.

When he reached Dwarka, the palace guards took him to Krishna. On seeing the Brahmin, Krishna immediately got up from his throne, gave him the courtesies and pujas due to a brahmin and put him in the care of an attendant. After the Brahmin had eaten and rested, he asked to speak to Krishna. He was led in and left alone with Krishna, who made him sit in comfort while he sat below him on the floor.

"Rulers who are kind to their subjects are always my friends and I am their ally, Brahmin. Where have you come from, from what country? And why have you taken such a difficult journey to come to me? Is there anything I can do for you?" Krishna asked.

The Brahmin told him the whole story of Rukmini, about her impending marriage to Sishupala and her message to Krishna.

"This is her message : 'The praise of your many qualities when heard, enters the heart. I have heard your praises. I have heard you described. Prince, my mind, my imagination is filled with thoughts of you. So much so, that I have forgotten a young girl's modesty. In every way you are without equal. Tell me then, beautiful Prince, what girl would not wish to have you as her husband. Therefore, beloved, I have accepted you as my husband. Come here and take me as your bride. You are called the unconquerable warrior, do not permit the jackal, Sishupala, to touch me.'

‘Come to my father’s city, and then, scattering and smashing the armies and warriors of Sishupala and Jarasandha, take me away by capture and *haran* and make me your bride. If you should feel that this will be very difficult, since I shall be in the women’s apartments surrounded by relations and guards, then let me tell you the means. In our family, it is the custom to take the bride-to-be to the Ambika Temple, outside the city limits, on the morning of her marriage. That is the time when you can easily capture me.

‘I wait to have you as my loved one. If this cannot be, then I shall go on a ritual fast and starve myself to death. May be, I shall have to pay the terrible price of countless bitter lives, but I shall hope that at the end of those lives, you shall be mine.’ ”

The Brahmin ended up by saying, “This is the secret message from Rukmini which I have carried in my mind and brought to you. Decide whatever you wish to do. Whatever action you are going to take, take it soon, and quickly, because there is very little time left before her marriage to Sishupala.”

When he had heard Rukmini’s message, Krishna smiled and putting his hand on the Brahmin’s knee said, “I feel the same about the Princess of Vidarbha, as she feels about me. I cannot even sleep for thinking about her. I know her brother Rukmi has prevented her marriage to me out of sheer envious enmity. But, Brahmin, do not worry. I shall pluck the beautiful princess who loves me out of that snarling pack.”

Krishna ordered his charioteer, Daruka, to get his chariot ready. Driving his four famous white horses, and with the Brahmin in his chariot, Krishna headed for Vidarbha.

At Kundina, the capital of Vidarbha, the people were preparing to celebrate the princess’s wedding. Trunks of the banana tree and areca-nut palm were put or planted before

doorways. City walls were painted and the people decorated the outer walls of their houses with mural paintings. The town was humming with excitement when Sishupala accompanied with his army, his friends, relations and Jarasandha arrived. Richly decorated elephants escorted them to the palaces, or houses, or camps, where they were to stay. Vishmaka gave rich presents to all those who had come.

At Dwarka, when Balarama found out that Krishna had gone alone to Vidarbha, he feared that there was likely to be trouble between Rukmi and Krishna, for Rukmi's enmity towards Krishna was a byword. Balarama ordered an army to head as fast as they could for Vidarbha, and taking a smaller force of their best warriors and chariots, he galloped towards Kundina city, hoping to catch up with Krishna.

In the inner apartments reserved for women, Rukmini looked out from the balcony. She saw the town decorated for her marriage and her heart sank. Where was the Brahmin and where was Krishna? There was no news, no message. Supposing she had done something so dreadful that Krishna had rejected her appeal? Surely he would not be so heartless. But where was the Brahmin? She was in despair.

Then at last, the Brahmin came in to see her. His face was bright and clear. Rukmini shut her eyes in thankfulness and prayer. "It is all right, Princess. He is here." He told her everything Krishna had said, in detail. Rukmini's face glowed with joy.

Vishmaka heard that Krishna and Balarama were on their way to his city to attend his daughter's marriage. Surprised, and yet very pleased, he arranged for their stay, and went to receive them, gave them presents and all the courtesies due to a guest, come for the marriage.

The next morning, while the people in the city kept looking at Krishna, and saying among themselves, "This would have

been the right bridegroom for our princess," Rukmini came out of the palace to go to the Ambika Temple.

She was to walk there, and though she was supposed to be thinking only of the Devi, Rukmini could only think of Krishna. She was fasting, in total silence, and she did not look at anyone. Surrounded by her older women relatives, her friends and companions, she was guarded by an army of soldiers with half-drawn swords and fully armed. There were musicians beating the mridanga-drums, conchshells blared and boomed, shrill pipes and dhol-drums beat out the rhythm. Married brahmin women followed, carrying trays full of garlands of flowers, sandalwood paste in cups of silver, incense and scented herbs. These women were dressed in their best clothes and jewels.

Rukmini washed her hands and feet for ritual cleanliness, and entered the temple. She prayed to Ambika Devi, "Grant me my heart's desire, Devi," and she bowed her head to the floor in front of the Devi. Rukmini then did her puja to the Devi with water, incense, rice, scented herbs, garlands of flowers, necklaces of gold, clothes, fruit, sweets and food, lighted lamps and the wealth of rulers and kings. Then she did puja to the Brahmin women for her married felicity with the blessings of these women. She was blessed by them. Then Rukmini broke her silence, put on a ring set with an enormous diamond and, holding the hand of her favourite companion, she stepped out of the temple.

Rukmini's beauty had great delicacy and charm. She had a taut and tiny waist. Her small breasts seemed to be loaded down by the weight of the jewelled necklace lying on them. A gem-studded gold chain encircled her hips. Her lips were delicately thin and a tender pink. The anklets gleamed on her small feet.

The warriors who watched her were stunned into silence.

and enchanted by her. Rukmini was smiling a little as she came out of the temple. As she walked towards the assembled guests, and saw Krishna, her smile deepened to show her little teeth. Not only had her beauty enchanted the men, but their fierce stance became a bit more relaxed, the weapons remained unthought of, and they only looked and gazed at Rukmini.

Knowing Krishna was there, Rukmini walked slower and even more slowly forward, and onwards, down the road, back towards the city. Shyly she turned her head to look towards the guests, and found herself looking straight into Krishna's eyes. Krishna stepped forward, took her hand, stepped a few paces back, swung her up into his chariot and, before the stupefied rulers, warriors, soldiers, womenfolk could think of doing anything, drove off with her—"like a lion would pick up his prey from the midst of a pack of jackals," the Puranas say.

Surrounded by Balarama and the Yadava warriors, Krishna's swift white horse galloped away.

Jarasandha and his assembled warriors could not bear the idea of the Yadavas running off with Sishupala's intended bride. They tightened their armour straps, they shouted, "Come on, we cannot permit this insult to our pride, our reputation as warriors. Those cowherd jackals have run off with the lion's meat." In their chariots, Sishupala's guests dashed after Krishna.

Rukmini's brother, Rukmi, was even more furious. He swore and took a vow that unless he killed Krishna, and got his sister back from "those cowherds, I shall not set foot inside this city again."

Krishna's chariot went on and on, while Balarama and his army contained the infuriated princes and rulers. A great many were killed. Jarasandha roared and shot endless number of arrows, but the Yadavas would not stop and fight a standing

battle. At last, Jarasandha and others realised the futility of the whole affair and turned back.

Sishupala was totally dejected, but Jarasandha consoled him with, "The times are not right. We will get our own back on those Yadavas when the time and situation is right." They then left Vidarbha and went back.

Rukmi in the meanwhile was tearing after Krishna. He managed to come up close enough to begin shooting his arrows. When Krishna saw that Rukmi would not stop, he shot his arrows and broke Rukmi's bow. Every time Rukmi picked up a fresh bow, Krishna broke it. He did this with all the weapons Rukmi picked up to fire, shoot or launch. Eventually, Krishna shot Rukmi's horses, his charioteer, and broke his chariot to pieces. Rukmi still would not give up, and rushed at Krishna on foot with his sword. When Krishna saw that Rukmi was really determined to kill him, he broke his sword, smashed his shield and swung his own sword up to kill Rukmi.

Rukmini was watching her brother and Krishna's battle with absolute terror; now, when she felt Krishna was going to kill her brother, she fell at his feet and begged for her brother's life.

"You are brave, you are also compassionate. It will not be right for you to kill my brother," she pleaded. Rukmini's face was pale, she was trembling, she could hardly speak. Krishna, looking at her, was filled with tenderness. He changed his mind about killing Rukmi. But Rukmi was still belligerent, so Krishna caught hold of him, tied him up with Rukmi's own scarf, then he shaved off his moustache, cut his hair short, and even shaved his head in odd places, to spoil his looks and make him look thoroughly silly.

By the time this battle with Rukmi was over, Balarama joined up with Krishna and saw Rukmi in his ludicrous and pa-

thetic condition.

Krishna found the situation very amusing, but Balarama was quite exasperated. "Krishna, you should not have done this. We should not do things which are unworthy of us." And he gave Krishna a long lecture but Krishna remained impenitent. He then consoled the terrified Rukmini, untied Rukmi, and escorting Krishna's chariot, headed back to Dwarka.

Rukmi had vowed never to return to his father's capital, unless he had killed Krishna and brought back his sister. He was so disgusted with the whole episode, so furious and angry that he stayed on where he was when Balarama released him. Later, when his people came to look for him and take him back to the city, he refused to return. He stayed and built a whole new town, which he named Bhoj-kata, for himself. And his implacable enmity towards Krishna never grew less.

On their reaching Dwarka, Krishna and Rukmini were married with proper Vedic rites. Ugrasena and Vasudeva were delighted with Krishna's bride.

The whole of Dwarka turned towards Krishna to bless him and his bride. Presents, jewels, clothes were heaped on them. Krishna's allies sent their messengers with presents for him, and all the city of Dwarka, and the tribes of Yadavas, went gay for days, and the story of Rukmini's *haran* was spoken of and sung from court to court.

Krishna's immediate family was vast, with all his half-brothers and cousins, and with everyone skilled in war and weapons, the Yadavas continued to grow in importance. Balarama was already married to Revati, daughter of King Revata, by the time Krishna married Rukmini. Vasudeva had a number of wives and many sons. Krishna was Devaki's eighth child, and then there was his one sister, Subhadra.

As years went by, Krishna had other wives besides Rukmini.

He then married Satyabhama who was his constant companion. She had such tremendous charm that she eventually became his principal wife, and it was said of Krishna that he could not deny her anything. He also married Jamvati. Popular story has made her out to be the daughter of a bear. It might be a delightful mythical story, but the ordinary fact was that she was the daughter of an aboriginal chieftain of the Rk tribe, whom Krishna defeated in battle. As was usual in those times, the chieftain gave over his daughter as a symbol of friendship between him and Krishna.

The King of Avanti's daughter was Krishna's cousin, and when her father said it was time for her swayamvara, or marriage by choice, the girl said she would marry only Krishna. When it was pointed out that he was not a ruler, and she was the daughter of so powerful a ruler as the King of Avanti, Binda said that it made not the slightest difference. Her brothers objected. She appealed to Krishna, who then did a *haran* during her swayamvara, fought a battle, took her to Dwarka and married her.

Krishna wanted to marry the daughter of the King of Kosala. He offered to take her without any dowry but the king said he had a vow, that he would give his daughter only to someone who could subdue his seven huge bulls. Krishna knew how to charm and handle cattle, so managed to quickly rope them together. And Satya became another of his wives.

One of his other wives was Bhadra, the daughter of the King of Kailkaya. He also married the daughter of the King of Madra Desh, called Lakshamana. This kingdom was somewhere near the Chenab river in Punjab. Because of these marriages, Krishna's influence became even more widespread.

Krishna had, eventually, twenty-eight sons. The Puranas say that his eldest son, Pradumna, was of such extraordinary beauty, or handsomeness, that no woman dared stay near

him, because of the surge of desire within them. Yet, he was amazingly like Krishna in looks. Because of this, even his mother, Rukmini, and his step-mothers, would smile and move away from him. The Puranas also say that he was Kama Deva, the god of love, born on earth by the original command of Narayana.

Krishna is supposed to have had another sixteen thousand wives. These women were once found confined in a castle, or fortress. Krishna killed the anti-god keeper of the castle and released the women. A sociological reason has also been put forward, that Krishna wanted the practice of concubinage to stop, so he married all these women. This was to assert that every woman in a man's household should have an equal status, therefore, she should be a wife and not a concubine.

The story of the sixteen thousand wives is pure allegory and the following explanation is according to a school of philosophy, called Sankhya.

The human is active through five organs of action; is receptive through another five organs of perception; there are, also, five pranas, or vital airs that pervade the body. This brings the total to fifteen, and with Mind, it all adds up to sixteen.

It is a common usage of speech to say that "we can do a thousand things, or feel a thousand different things." The doing of different things, or the feeling of different things, is power. Power is Shakti and Shakti is wife. So, Krishna, who conquered the fortress of his body, released and gained control over his various faculties, and he could use each "in a thousand different ways". But he controlled them with compassion, instead of gross power, so he was their husband.

From the point of psychology, the completely whole person is fully compassionate towards himself, which also means his various faculties.



*K*rishna and the five Pandava brothers, and Krishna and Arjuna's friendship, is a household word, phrase, and practically an idiom in the languages of India. Krishna had another friend in Uddhava, but he belonged to Krishna's life in Mathura and Dwarka, to leisure and philosophical conversations.

Krishna and Arjuna are so inseparable that their names are analogous to the first-ever rishis, Nara and Narayana.

Deep in the far Himalayas is the final pilgrim's destination of the Hindu—the Temple of Badrinath. The image is that of Vishnu as the Yogi. Guarding it are the two towering mountain peaks known as Nara and Narayana.

All through the Mahabharata, the firm friendship between Krishna and Arjuna, and the Pandava's absolute faith in him, runs as a strong thread. Krishna's sagacious advice, and

the powerful strength of his presence is a thread on which all the well known traditional stories of the Mahabharata are strung. He is like a shining light in the murk of deceit, devilousness and ugly violence.

Krishna was a cousin of the Pandavas through their mother, Kunti, who was the sister of Krishna's father. Their first acquaintance and meeting is recorded in the Mahabharata as taking place during Draupadi's swayamvara, or the selection of her husband, in a huge concourse of rulers invited by Draupadi's father, Raja Drupada.

The scene of the swayamvara is described in some of the recensions of the Mahabharata "as a place where the royalty of the world was present." Certainly, nearly a whole chapter is taken up with the list of names.

As for the place: "All around the pennants and flags fluttered. Horse and elephant tread shook the very earth and the noise of voices all around was a thrumming cacophony. The enclosure was canopied and decorated with gold, silver, tassels of pearls and coral. Water, scented with sandalwood, was sprinkled to lay the dust rising from the feet of the innumerable royal guests and their armies. Brahmins came from all over the country, for the most lavish gifts would be given to them after the swayamvara was over.

Exquisite gates and deep moats encircled the place. The scent of aloes and myrrh rose from incense holders. Beautiful chairs, thrones, and divans studded with gems were set around for the guests."

Then in comes Draupadi, and her beauty is described in poetic terms: "Her face is like the night-blossoming lily. She is dark and one of her names is, therefore, Krishna. Her eyes are long and are like two fishes swimming within her liquid glance. So beautiful are those eyes that they shame the deers. Her arms are like lotus stems. Perfect as the trunk.

of the plantain tree are her thighs, the perfection of her hips and buttocks lent a special sway to her walk. Her hair was like the night sky, thick, beautiful and full of glinting light. She was not just one with beautiful hair but the beautiful-haired one, and most marvellous was the scent from her body. It was subtler than the lotus and streamed from her."

The royal princes looked at her and desire gleamed in their eyes. "Their eyes observed the gold chains and tassels of pearls lying against the space between her thighs. The god Kama was letting loose sheaves of arrows all around."

The five Pandava brothers were there, sitting among the brahmins, as they were still in hiding from their jealous cousin, Duryodhana, who had tried to have them murdered by duplicity and arson. They too were "pierced with arrows of the god of love".

Krishna and Balarama, too, were at the swayamvara. In most of the recensions nothing is said of whether they took part in the actual contest of the archery skill, by which the princess's hand had to be won. Their names, however, were called out by Draupadi's brother when he called out the names of the royal suitors in the hall, with Draupadi standing beside him listening, as he tells her their names.

It is when Krishna and Balarama are sitting there, watching the princes fail to string the bow, that Krishna looks towards the brahmin crowd and frowns, then he turns to Balarama and says, "Those are the five Pandava brothers," and takes their names one by one.

Then after Arjuna had won the contest, and was battling with the enraged princes, Krishna again turned to Balarama and said, he was now convinced that these must be Bhima and Arjuna—an invincible combination when they fought together.

The kings and princes were shouting their anger, because a mealy-mouthed brahmin was being allowed to carry off the Princess. The battle raged on, with Bhima uprooting a tree with his bare hands and stripping it of its branches, and using it as a weapon. Krishna said that there was nothing to worry about, for even if any number of gods and anti-gods joined hands, Arjuna could deal with them. He would not find it difficult to get rid of these mortal kings, but if Arjuna really needed help, "We will help." Balarama agreed with him.

The brahmins, waving their deerskins and hollow coconut shells, which were their begging bowls, were also furiously angry and ready to help Arjuna. Arjuna laughed and begged them to move aside. Eventually better sense prevailed all round, Krishna stopped the fighting, and stayed with Arjuna and Bhima as they escorted Draupadi out, and to their place where they lived in a potter's house. Later, Krishna followed them, and saw Yudhisthira sitting, surrounded by his brothers.

In most recensions of the Mahabharata, their conversation is very brief and then Krishna goes away. But in the Kashi-dasi Mahabharata, the whole scene is described in great detail, and fills in all the questions that everyone would like to know.

When Krishna went in, he met Kunti. He touched her feet and said, "I am Krishna, your nephew and this is my brother, Balarama."

Kunti put her arms round them, made them sit near her and wept in joy and sorrow. "Where were all of you all these years? For twelve years we have wandered from place to place, with nowhere to lay our heads in peace and safety. My eyes have grown weak with the tears I have shed. Where was my brother all these years? Why have you never tried to

find us?"

Krishna spoke tenderly to his aunt. "Do not weep, Aunt, do not grieve. We were told you had died when your house was burnt down. Bodies were found there—a woman and five young men. We were told you were all dead. My father would hardly eat for a whole week, and then he sent me to Hastinapur to get details. Thinking of you, my father still grieves, still sheds tears. Your days of misfortune are over now. You should now return to your home and country."

Krishna went to Yudhishthira and the cousins embraced each other. They sat together for a long time, and told Krishna all about the tragic days when their house was burnt down and how they had escaped. They told him of all their adventures, their difficult days and the days when they could not bear to see their mother's feet torn by thorns and stony paths. And how Bhima had put her on his back and carried her, day after day.

Hearing of their hardships, Krishna was horrified. "Wicked as Dhritarashtra is, Duryodhana is even worse. They will have to pay for everything they have done. Go back and demand your share of the kingdom, and if they do not give it to you, we will all come and defeat them."

Then Yudhishthira asked Krishna how he was able to see through their brahmin disguise, and know that they were the five Pandava brothers. Krishna smiled. "Can fire be kept hidden? Who but the Pandavas could have fought as Bhima and Arjuna fought today?"

They parted company and Krishna blessed them as he left: "May you flourish, as fire in a cave leaps up and grows."

Krishna was with them again, when Draupadi was married to the five Pandava brothers by her father, and gifts were given to the bride and grooms.

Krishna gave the Pandava brothers gold ornaments en-

crusted with pearls and lapis lazuli. Gorgeous robes from all over the world made of fine wool woven and embroidered, shawls, blankets, furs, and skins of strange animals. He gave them water jugs, pots, and many utensils studded with lapis and pearls. He gave them women attendants, maid-servants—all well trained; there were also elephants trained in Madra Desh, horses, chariots and enormous wealth in gold coins.

Besides being marriage presents, these gifts from Krishna were meant to give the Pandavas the dignity of wealthy princes.

From that time onwards, Krishna becomes part of their lives. He remains in Drupada's kingdom, keeping the Pandavas company, and giving them the added strength and dignity of being allies of Krishna and his people.

The Pandavas had lost their place in the Kuru kingdom due to the enmity and machinations of their cousins, and the weakness of their uncle, Dhritarashtra, the King.

When Duryodhana, his brothers and his friends, and hot-headed counsellor, Karna, returned to Hastinapur with the news that the Pandavas had married Draupadi, and that they were now allies of the powerful King Drupada, there was consternation in the court. Karna was all for attacking and destroying the Pandavas. "Before Krishna gets the chance to lead his Yadavas to help Drupada and the Pandavas, let us finish them off."

After much discussion and argument, it is Vidura, their quiet-spoken, wise uncle, who says the vital words. "The Yadavas are many and they are powerful. Where Krishna is, they will be. Victory is where Krishna is."

So it was finally decided to send Vidura to Drupada's court to fetch the Pandavas back to their Kuru land.

When Vidura reached the court and invited the brothers to come back, they turned to Krishna for advice. It was on his advice that they returned. Krishna accompanied them to Hastinapur and stayed with them as a powerful ally. When Dhritarashtra gave the Pandavas half the kingdom, and sent them to Khandavaprastha, Krishna led them, and stayed with them in their camp while the capital was being built.

Myth says Krishna called heaven's architect, Vishwakarma, to build their city and commanded him to build one to match Indra's capital. And then Krishna pronounced, "From this day onwards Khandavaprastha will be known as Indraprastha."

Krishna stayed with them while the city and its surroundings became rehabilitated. Fresh water tanks were dug, beautiful gardens were laid, flowering trees planted, broad roads set out; thirty-two gates were built and then Yudhisthira entered his capital.

A vast crowd paid homage to the Pandavas and to Krishna. When the work was finally completed, the architect left.

It was time to return to Dwarka and before Krishna left, Yudhisthira spoke of his gratitude to Krishna. "It is all the result of your grace. It is you who have given us this throne and made the land prosper."

Krishna said; "No, it was your own effort that has given you this kingdom, it is your ancestral kingdom, and who else but you should rule it?"

When Krishna goes to say farewell to his aunt, Kunti, she, too, speaks of her gratitude and begs him to remember them. "You are a friend of the forlorn and helpless. Remember us, Krishna."

Krishna promised both his aunt, and the Pandavas, that he would always stand by them. He advised Yudhisthira to rule his kingdom with the strength of dharma, and then,

having established the Pandavas firmly in Indraprastha, he and Balarama returned to Dwarka.

Yudhisthira and his brothers continued to rule the kingdom wisely and well. The years passed, everyone was happy and all was well till Arjuna had to go into exile for twelve years, because of having broken the brothers' self-imposed rule.

The whole story of Arjuna's exile begins from the time a brahmin came to beg for help and Arjuna went to retrieve his stolen cattle.

A brahmin came one day to Arjuna, railing and screaming that thieves had stolen his cattle. "I am old and unable to defend my property, you must help me." Tears were spilling out of the old man's eyes.

Arjuna got up to offer the usual courtesy but the old brahmin would not accept it. He said, "How can you waste time with these empty formalities, while those thieves are running off with my cattle? Come, Arjuna, bring your weapons. Do not just sit there. Get up, get up." Arjuna looked at the old brahmin but he hesitated, then remembered that each tear that falls on the ground from a brahmin's eye, is the burden of a hundred thousand sins on the man who does not try to prevent it. With long strides, Arjuna walked towards the House of Weapons, where all the weapons were stored. As Arjuna came near the steps, he looked round and knew his eldest brother, King Yudhisthira, was here and with him was Draupadi.

The brothers themselves made the rule, that if Draupadi was with any of them, not one of the others was to enter that particular house, unless he was asked to.

The brahmin was still weeping and crying. Arjuna sighed and walked in, took his magnificent bow, his bejewelled quiver with the arrows which never failed to reach their

mark, and followed the brahmin. The cows were recovered, the thieves punished and the happy brahmin blessed him.

Arjuna went to Yudhishthira and stood before him with bowed head, looking down.

"Come, Arjuna, sit beside us."

"Command me banishment from the kingdom for twelve years."

"But why?"

Arjuna told him.

"But the understanding was if a younger brother was with Draupadi, then the elder would be banished if he broke the rule, but you are younger than me."

Arjuna pleaded, "Let us not indulge in subtle juggling of words. Allow me to go. It is better this way. Honour is always preferable to dishonest means and manipulations."

It was a sad but proud family that blessed him, touched his feet, loved him and watched him go for twelve years into banishment.

Arjuna took a vow of austerity and with a small group of brahmins accompanying him, he began his journeys to every place of pilgrimage.

During those years of exile, Arjuna wandered all over India. In the north he travelled to the country of the Takshak-Nagas where the Princess Ulupi persuaded, or forced, him to spend a night with her. He went eastward to Manipur, where he married the Princess Chitrangada and lived there for over a year. The years went by, Arjuna had been everywhere and now he reached the western seaboard of India, and arrived at Pravasa in the Republic of the Yadavas.

Krishna was in Raivataka when he heard that Arjuna had come to Pravasa. Raivataka was a lovely place, hilly, with a light forest, cool and green. All the members of the Council of the Republic, the great warriors, the women of their

households had also come, and Krishna's beautiful wives.

Krishna hurried to Pravasa, with chariots and gifts, to fetch Arjuna. When the great concourse of people went forward a short distance, down the path, to receive them, they did not know who was the more charming, Krishna or Arjuna. Both had the same cloud-blue tinge, the same firm red lips, and they wore the same yellow garments.

Arjuna stepped down from the chariot and touched Vasudeva's feet. "You are more than welcome, Arjuna," Vasudeva said, "but what brings you to Pravasa?" While he explained, the warriors, filled with curiosity gathered round Arjuna. "Then stay with us till your twelve years are over," Vasudeva said. Everyone sympathised, and Krishna led Arjuna onwards, towards his home.

The women came forward now with garlands of flowers. They asked the usual courteous questions and welcomed him. As he was talking to them Arjuna saw a girl in the full flush of loveliness, and turning to Krishna asked, "Sakha, who is that lovely girl, walking the last, behind the others? It seems she is unmarried. Who is she?"

"She is Vasudeva's daughter, and my sister. Her name is Subhadra, and she is still unmarried for lack of a suitable bridegroom." Greatly embarrassed, Arjuna said no more.

But Subhadra saw Arjuna and looked at him. She stumbled, her feet would not carry her further. Krishna's wife, Satyabhama came up to her, "What is this, why are you here, why have you not gone on with the other ladies?"

"Help me, I cannot walk, there is a thorn in my foot." Satyabhama helped her and then looked for the thorn. "What nonsense is this? There is no mark of even the prick of a thorn, nothing. Why this pretence, this make-believe and acting?"

Subhadra sighed and whispered, "What shall I tell you? It

is Arjuna, he looked at me. That glance was like his unerring arrows. Sister, what shall I do? See how I tremble, my heart thunders, I am dying. Let me be, I cannot go in. Let me just look at him."

Satyabhama said, "Do not behave so shamelessly, you forget who you are. Are you going to shame us all by saying that having looked at a man, you are dying? There has never been a more shameless girl in any other royal family. Compose yourself. Someone might hear you. Come indoors."

Subhadra's eyes filled with tears, brimmed over and rolled down her lovely face, "Accursed is the life of a woman. What an unworthy existence, let me die."

"This world maintains its continuity through a woman. Only if there is a wife is it a home. Therefore without a woman there can be no continuity at all."

Still sobbing, Subhadra said, "Yes, all this is true but without a man life itself cannot be, so without a man it is useless and serves no purpose."

Satyabhama laughed, "Do not be so upset, little sister. I will ask my mother-in-law to get you a warrior husband from a noble family. Handsome enough to delight your heart, only come now."

"Nothing that you say means anything. There is only one person I can think about, the Pandava warrior, Arjuna. I shall die if I cannot have him as mine by tonight, and if I die my death will be at your door."

"Very well, you will have your Arjuna by tonight. Do come in now." Subhadra walked home happily with Satyabhama.

Later that night Satyabhama went to Krishna and explained the situation. "Your sister is going to give up her life, so you had better deal with this. Ever since she has set her

eyes on Arjuna she has not left my side. She says, 'Give me Arjuna as a husband, or I shall put the sin of killing a defenceless woman on you.'

Krishna smiled. "Arjuna has come here after a very long time, and I was wondering what I could give him as a suitable gift. This has turned out very well. I will give him Subhadra as his bride, but keep her quiet for this one night."

"It is no use, she insists she must have him tonight."

Krishna said, "This is beyond my capabilities. I can do nothing tonight. But you are wise and very clever. Do what you think best, but do not let there be a scandal of any kind."

The traditional story is that Satyabhama tricked Arjuna and sent Subhadra into his room and then, laughing at his discomfiture, accused him of being compromised. She got them married by Gandharva rites that night.

Next day when Krishna put before the Council his proposal that Subhadra should be given in marriage to Arjuna, the Council agreed. But Balarama objected. He put a counter suggestion of Duryodhana being a better match, since he was his father's eldest son and virtually the King.

On the face of it, there was nothing the Council could say, but they were not happy about it.

Balarama sent a proposal of marriage to Duryodhana who, on receiving it, was overjoyed. He felt that if Krishna had agreed to give his sister to him, then he, and not the Pandavas, would have Krishna's support. Now he need no longer fear the Pandava brothers.

In the women's apartments, Satyabhama was in a state of absolute consternation, not knowing what to do. She went to Devaki for advice, who then went to try and persuade Balarama, but he was quite firm. "In what way is Arjuna a better

match than Duryodhana?" He also pointed out that he had already sent the proposal to Duryodhana.

Krishna was the least perturbed, in spite of Satyabhama's overwrought statement that she was going to drown herself. He laughed and caressed his beautiful wife, sent for Arjuna and suggested that he had better do the traditional *haran*, and openly capture and run off with Subhadra.

Arjuna agreed, but he was most perplexed and sent a messenger to Yudhisthira who answered, "Do whatever Krishna tells you to do."

Yudhisthira received an invitation from Balarama to attend Subhadra's marriage to Duryodhana. Not understanding what the exact situation was, he sent Bhima ahead, saying he would follow later.

When the messengers arrived from Duryodhana, that he would be arriving within a day, Krishna sent for Arjuna, gave him his own chariot and charioteer, Daruka, and told him, "It is time you went for a hunt, Arjuna. Subhadra has gone to the temple near the river."

Arjuna then did the *haran*. He was challenged by the Yadavas. Daruka refused to turn to fight Krishna's sons, so Arjuna tied Daruka to the chariot post and, with Subhadra driving the chariot, he turned to fight and cut the bow-strings of all those who attacked him. Subhadra had been taught to drive the chariot by Krishna, and she was such an expert that this enabled Arjuna to easily bring the attack to a standstill.

Messengers rushed back to inform Balarama and Krishna of the state to which the young Yadavas had been reduced. Balarama accused Krishna of lending Arjuna his own chariot. Krishna answered: "But everyone knows that Arjuna has been riding in my chariot ever since he has been our guest. And if Subhadra is driving the chariot, how is Daruka to

blame?"

The messenger pleaded for some decision to be taken, as Krishna's sons had not yet been able to capture Arjuna. "Tell me, sirs, what am I to tell them, for they say that either you or Lord Krishna, must come now."

Krishna said no one could capture Arjuna. Certainly not the young Yadavas. In any case what wrong had Arjuna committed? "It is not considered wrong for a kshatriya to do a *haran*—in fact, it is always acknowledged as the action of a warrior."

Then Krishna pleaded for a reasonable attitude towards the whole business. What was the point of a great deal of unnecessary violence?

"And let us look at our sister. If she did not want Arjuna why is she driving the chariot?" He pointed out that it just was not possible to capture Arjuna alive. Of course, they could send the whole Yadava army against him, and kill him. "So he will die. And then what will our sister do? She will kill herself and she, too, will die. At the end of all this, what have we achieved?"

Krishna again asked for a calm, reasoned approach to the whole affair. "Send someone to bring Arjuna back and give him Subhadra in marriage. Everyone will be happy."

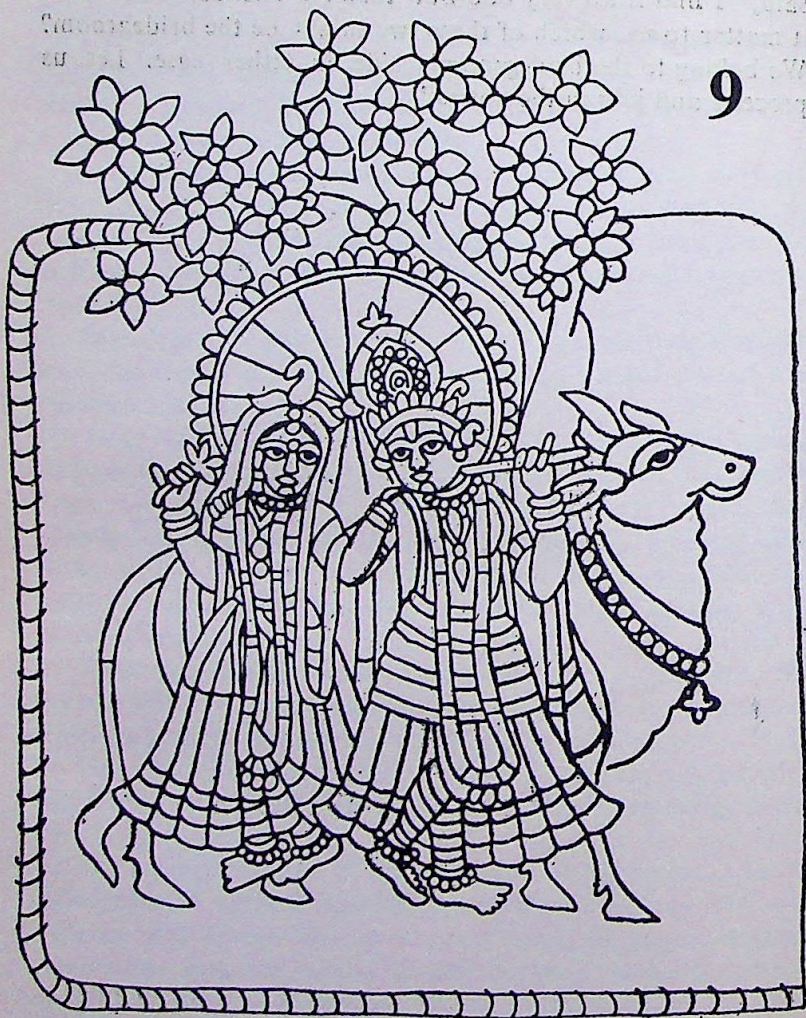
Balarama, though angry, annoyed and exasperated with Krishna, eventually agreed and sent Satyaki to bring them back.

While Arjuna and Subhadra were being escorted back, Duryodhana arrived and he, naturally, was furious. He and Karna said things against Arjuna which Bhima overheard, and there was very nearly a fight between them all. Grandfather Bhishma calmed them, got everything sorted out and sent Duryodhana back to Hastinapur.

And the old man took the sanest attitude when Bhishma

said, "I find it all very odd but then old friends, what does it matter to us, which of these two might be the bridegroom? We belong to the bridegroom's side in either case. Let us proceed and join in the antics."





After the marriage, Arjuna stayed in Dwarka for a year, then moved to other places and, after the twelve years were over, he returned to Indraprastha.

When Krishna got news that Arjuna and Subhadra had at last got back to Indraprastha, he with other well known warriors and personages of his clan, and the heads of various other clans and tribes, left for Indraprastha to pay the formal visit after Subhadra's marriage.

He took great gifts for the Pandavas, and gifts for Subhadra. He gave chariots, herds of white milch cows, horses and mules. Balarama gave a thousand elephants as his personal gift. These gifts were of enormous wealth and did not please the enemies of the Pandavas.

The Yadava and Vrishni chiefs stayed for many days and

there were enormous feasts. Eventually they left, taking all kinds of lovely gems as gifts from Yudhisthira.

Krishna stayed on. Arjuna and he were always out hunting, always together—a legend in reality. Subhadra had a son and Krishna performed the birth rituals, and again enormous gifts, gold coins, wealth, came to the Pandavas.

The years go by, Krishna's nephew grows up, greatly loved and cared for by him. And so the years pass by and one day, in summer, when Krishna was visiting him, Arjuna suggested that they go on an outing to the banks of the Yamuna. Krishna was very pleased with the idea.

They go to the river side where there are lovely mansions with rooms studded with gems. Rooms full of lovely girls—they have a marvellous time, good food, wine. Subhadra and Draupadi are with them, and there is a great deal of noise and merriment.

During all this, Krishna and Arjuna slip away by themselves and sit, away from the women, talking about war and weapons, when an old brahmin comes and says that he is hungry. They ask, what would he like to eat? The brahmin tells them he wants to devour the forest of Khandavaprastha, as he is the god Agni.

Veda Vyasa, the author of the Mahabharata, had a way of putting the most abstruse and baffling set of verses and stanzas, between a clear straightforward narration. The episode of the Khandava forest is one of these.

On analysis, however, the burning of the forest could be because, now that the Pandava kingdom was becoming more and more prosperous, and expanding, it required additional land. They wished to clear the wild animals from that area and, also, the aborigine tribals who were living in the Khandava forest.

It is summer time and the forest burns easily. Krishna

and Arjuna wanted to hunt and here was the opportunity.

There are two important points to remember in the story. One is that the tribal architect, Maya Danava, seeks Arjuna's protection and so is saved from Krishna's weapons. The other is, that it is here that the famous Gandiva Bow is made available to Arjuna, as well as the Devadatta conch. Krishna, too, gets his Kaumodaki Mace.

There are many a story within a story in this incident of the burning of Khandava forest. Artists of all the Pahari schools have painted wonderful pictures of the blazing forest; of flames issuing from Krishna's mouth, of the god Indra hurling thunder and rain to quench the fire and Krishna and Arjuna fighting back.

The reason Veda Vyasa gives for Agni wanting to burn Khandava, or eat it as he said, is a delightful tongue-in-cheek story.

Once upon a time, there was a King Sveta. He was always doing yajnas. It seemed that this was all that he was interested in, and eventually the eyes of his priests were so sore from the perpetual smoke of the yajna fires, that they refused to do any more yajnas.

Not one priest or purohit would listen to him. Exasperated they said to him, "Go to Shiva. See if he will agree." The King went to Kailasha mountain and did tremendous tapas, penance, meditation, and, eventually, Shiva asked what he wanted. The King said he wanted him to act priest at his yajna. Shiva laughed, said the gods cannot act priest, and told him to go to Durvasa Muni.

The Muni agreed, and for twelve years the fire of the yajna was fed with ghee. At the end of that time, Agni was pale and sick. He had no radiance or strength. Agni went to Brahma complaining about his condition, as he could not understand what had happened.

Brahma says to him that it is not surprising he is ill considering the amount of ghee he has been licking for the last so many years. He advises that the cure is to eat up a forest full of animals. Marrow, bones and the flesh of animals are what he needs to regain his strength. But when Agni starts a fire, it either rains, or the Nagas put the fire out. Now Krishna and Arjuna were to help him regain his strength.

The holocaust of Khandava is fearsome, and the description of Krishna killing with his Chakra is graphically put into words, with the "mangled Daityas dripping with blood" and the hissing of Agni as gobbets of flesh fall into the fire.

Besides Maya Danava who seeks Arjuna's protection and is saved from the Khandava forest fire, there are four birds called Sarangakas who are also spared by Agni.

Whether Sarangakas are actual birds, or aboriginal tribals of that name, or a clan or some totem-like sign, is a different point, but once again, there is a story.

There was a Rishi Mandapala who went to heaven but was denied access. He wanted to know why these regions were closed to him. "Listen", said the gods, "men are born debtors. They have to repay these debts by yajnas, *tapas* and children. You have paid the first two but you have no children, so the celestial region is closed to you. A son is called *putra*, because he saves his father from the hell called *puta*. Good Brahmin, go have children."

So Mandapala thought the quicker he had children the quicker he would go to heaven. He becomes a male Sarangaka bird and mates with Jarita. When she lays four eggs, he goes off with a female called Lapita. Poor Jarita brings up her babies all by herself. In the meanwhile, the Rishi met Agni and because he knew why Agni was heading for Khandava he asked him to spare his children. Agni agreed.

When the forest is blazing Jarita is distracted. She keeps wondering which child she can save, for she cannot save them all. The fire licks nearer and nearer, and the little birds say to their mother that she should fly away to safety. "If we die you can still have more children, but if you die, there will be no one to redeem our race. Think well, do not do something just because you love us." Jarita leaves them and saves herself.

At the other end, Mandapala Rishi remembers his wife and children, and worries about them. His Lapita is furious. "Go to Jarita. I shall wander alone—it will be my punishment for loving a fickle man." Mandapala Rishi hurries to Khandava, and by the time he gets there, finds Jarita and her children alive and safe. He speaks lovingly to Jarita but she does not answer. Then she turns on him, and speaks scathingly, "Go to sweet-smiling Lapita. . . ."

Veda Vyasa ends the affair by making Mandapala Rishi say: "Nothing affects a woman more in this world than a co-wife, or a secret beloved of her husband's. How the flames of jealousy flare up. Men should never put their faith in a woman. And when she becomes a mother then a wife cares even less for her husband."

The incidents of the Khandava end with Agni being satisfied after consuming the forest for fifteen days. Then Indra appears, promising weapons to Arjuna and granting Krishna's asked-for boon, that his friendship with Arjuna be eternal.

The character, Maya Danava, is an architect and when he wants to do something for Arjuna, to thank him for saving his life, Arjuna laughs, says he wants nothing and turns him over to Krishna.

Krishna sat with Maya, got him to talk and, when he realised that Maya was really an expert architect, he told

him to build the Pandavas an assembly hall finer than any in any other kingdom.

Krishna decided he must now return to Dwarka for a while. His departure from Indraprastha is described in a manner which gives an idea about the traditional way in which a well-born, well-mannered man took leave of his family and relations.

First he goes to Kunti, his aunt, and prostrates himself at her feet. She lifts him up and performs the ritual called 'smelling his head'. And this is exactly what the ritual is—the meaning implies that you take the scent of a person's presence into your heart. Krishna then visits each of his relations in turn. Subhadra stands before him with bowed head, and gives him the messages she wishes conveyed to her relations in Dwarka. Then when he has met Draupadi, he goes outside. Here brahmins are waiting with garlands. He presents them with bowls of curds, fruit and rice, and then he circles round them and after being blessed by the brahmins leaves on his journey.

The Pandavas showed Krishna the highest courtesy by Yudhisthira driving his chariot, while Arjuna held the yak-tail whisk. Bhima, the Twins and other citizens walked behind them, holding the enormous gold umbrella with its pearl-studded shaft.

After a certain distance, Krishna once again made the formal gestures and asked them to go back. Now Yudhisthira did the 'smelling of the head' ritual, and gave permission to Krishna to leave. Krishna promised to return and the Pandavas went back to Indraprastha.

After a few days Maya asked to be allowed to go and fetch certain gems from a hidden hoard about which he had some knowledge. He required these for the hall.

Maya built a Hall which became both famous and notorious, for it was the wonder of this Hall and the wealth displayed which filled Duryodhana with bitter envy, jealousy and rage. It was one of many minor incidents that finally led to the contrived dice game, the exile of the Pandavas and the war on the battlefield of Kurukshetra.

It was this Assembly Hall, built by Maya, whose display of lavish wealth is described in the Mahabharata: He built a pool in the middle, in which floated lilies with petals made of gems, their centres studded with precious stones. There were flowers, the petals of which were of gold, so delicate that they trembled in the breeze. There were tortoise and fish made of gold, and the steps leading into the water of the pool were made of crystal. It was so richly decorated with gems, pearls and uncut diamonds, and the floor was made of marble, stones of different colours and so highly polished, that some kings mistook the floor for water and water for the floor, and fell into it.

This was exactly what happened to Duryodhana, but that was much later in the sequence of events. First, there was a great assembly of rulers, who were invited to visit Yudhishthira when the Hall was ready.

Krishna came too, and before he returned to Dwarka, he warned him that Narada Muni would be visiting, and to be very careful how he answered any of his questions. Krishna reminded him that Narada was learned in all branches of learning, he had a brilliant memory and he could bewilder the very gods by his cleverness. When Narada Muni came, he put the most pointed questions to Yudhishthira and when he had decided that he was a capable ruler, Narada advised him to do the Rajasuya ceremonies to make himself the absolute ruler or the Chakravartin.

After thinking over the matter for a long time, and having

consulted a great many people, Yudhisthira sent for Krishna. He said he was certain Krishna would give him the most balanced and objective advice.

Krishna came as soon as the messenger reached Dwarka and, naturally, all the Pandava brothers were overjoyed at his arrival, particularly Arjuna. Yudhisthira explained his thoughts about the Rajasuya, and then said that some ministers had urged him to go ahead with his plans, but he felt this was because they were his friends and wished to please him. "You, Krishna, are not motivated by selfishness. I depend on you to tell me what is right and what I should do."

Krishna told him that he was worthy of doing, performing, the Rajasuya but. . . .

It was this 'but' which was important. Krishna explained to him the two great dynastic divisions which had now broken up into innumerable rulers, and minor dynasties. But towering over them all was the descendant of the Bhoja dynasty—Jarasandha, who had undisputed overlordship over nearly a hundred rulers.

"His aim is conquest by dissension, and he is a very able, capable and valiant fighter. But he is brutal and ruthless."

Jarasandha had captured over eighty other rulers and he was keeping them prisoner, practically tied to an executioner's block. Jarasandha had said he would kill the whole lot when he had a round hundred to sacrifice. His brutality, and the tremendous power of the fighting capability of his armies, had cowed all the independent kingdoms. Others were retreating to the West, or to the South.

Krishna told Yudhisthira how Jarasandha had defeated the Yadavas long ago. He also explained the whole background of the enmity of Jarasandha towards the Yadavas. For fear of Jarasandha, Krishna's whole clan had fled from

Mathura to live in the safety of Dwarka. How could Yudhis-thira dream of performing the Rajasuya, without first killing Jarasandha and releasing the captive kings? "You cannot call yourself an absolute ruler by performing the Rajasuya as long as Jarasandha is alive."

Yudhisthira not only agreed with Krishna, but he was not quite sure whether he should not give up the whole idea. If the cunning and cruelty of Jarasandha frightened even Krishna's people, what chance had the Pandavas? However, Bhima and Arjuna were both sure that there was no point in vacillating. Arjuna said he had the skill, the valour and the will to defeat the enemy. It was the will which mattered: "Let us fight."

Krishna approved of Arjuna's attitude for, as he said, for a kshatriya it was the natural, normal attitude and duty. That is how he should conduct himself. The martial code says that he must attack his enemy. If he manoeuvres well, he will win. In any case, one must win and the other lose. Both cannot win, neither can both lose. As for death—who knows when death will come, whether during the day, or during the night. A kshatriya must always do his duty. If he plans badly he can be destroyed, or there might even be a deadlock. "So let us plan well, and kill him by the same means as a river topples a tree, by undermining the roots."

Krishna went on to say that they had to deceive the king's secret service and get straight to him, without his armies and commanders getting to know about the impending attack. The enemy must have no time and opportunity to plan. "Our aim is to kill Jarasandha, or die in the attempt."

"Jarasandha is not in his usual strong position, because he has lost his two strongest allies and formidable fighters. These were two brothers, but they have committed suicide due to a tremendous misunderstanding and incorrect news. Now

is the time to attack. I know how to plan, Bhima has super-human strength and Arjuna has the skill to guard us both. We are like the triple flame of yajna fire."

Krishna thought that Jarasandha's arrogance was so enormous that, should he be challenged, he would never refuse. There were three reasons for this; one was his innate arrogance, second, he would never accept the risk of other rulers making any derogatory remarks about his courage, or capabilities as a valiant fighter, and last of all, Jarasandha's own impetuosity.

He told Yudhisthira, that the only way to destroy Jarasandha was to challenge him to single combat. No army could defeat him so, definitely, guile was necessary. He said if Yudhisthira gave him both Arjuna and Bhima he, Krishna, would think up a plan to get to Jarasandha and finish him. Reluctantly, Yudhisthira agreed—begging Krishna to be very careful "For without you, Krishna, the Pandavas cannot live."

Yudhisthira asked Krishna what was so special about Jarasandha. Then Krishna told him the story of Jarasandha's birth.

"There was a ruler of Magadha called Brihadratha, very powerful in both personal combat and with his superbly trained fighting men. He was a handsome man, and the ruler of Kashi gave both his daughters to him in marriage. He was extremely devoted to rituals and ceremonies and yajnas but, in spite of everything, he had no children. He grew old and finally, deeply frustrated and disappointed, he decided to give up his kingdom and go into the forest to live as an ascetic.

"The day he was leaving he met Rishi Gautama's son in a mango grove just outside the city. When the Rishi heard of his frustration and sorrow, he gave him a mango, into which he had whispered some mantras, and said that the king was

to give it to his wife. He told him that in due course he would have an immensely strong son. But the king gave half the fruit to each of his wives, and they are reputed to have had half a child each. The final part of the story is, that after the horrified queens had thrown the halves away, a witch put the two halves together and it became a whole child. Anyway, that is the story, and he is certainly incredibly strong."

Krishna then told Yudhisthira that he had thought of a plan. Bhima was to challenge Jarasandha to a wrestling match, and during the bout, he would be able to kill him. But they had to get to Jarasandha's city of Rajagriha by secret means. No one must know that Krishna, with Arjuna and Bhima, was going there.

After some time, the three left for Rajagriha. When they reached near Jarasandha's territory, they disguised themselves by acting and dressing like brahmins who were householders, and not ascetics.

As they neared Rajagriha, Krishna explained that this fortress city of Jarasandha's was formidable. It was ringed by hills and rings of fortress walls. There were five hills and five rings of walls, and then a massive gate. As soon as an enemy approached, by some means the gates closed immediately and huge drums began to sound—"And there are naga-serpents guarding the drums." On hearing these drums, the army was immediately alerted. No enemy had the courage to attack this fortress.

They decided to approach the city by a circuitous route over the hills. Krishna knew of a secret entrance to where these drums were, in a cave inside the hills. He showed Bhima the place through which they could enter the hill. Bhima then broke a passage and tunneled through the hill into the cave. At the same time, before they actually entered the cave, Arjuna broke the drums and their mechanism by shooting his

arrow, through the sound of the serpents moving, for he had the skill to hit a target merely by sound—sight was not necessary. Krishna got rid of the serpents by the power of the anti-serpent Garuda Mantra.

Having neutralised the first set of obstacles, and the most formidable, they climbed down the hill and entered the city, by mingling with the crowds going in and out of the city gates.

While Krishna and the Pandava brothers were tunneling their way in, Jarasandha's priests felt, and predicted, that some evil was coming upon their ruler. They did various rituals and asked Jarasandha to go on a fast, so as to purify his physical system.

Krishna, Arjuna and Bhima walked down the road of the fortress and found it to be a bustling city, full of shops filled with every type and kind of luxury item. They found a shop selling garlands of flowers and scented oils. They took these and some silk cloth with which they draped themselves. The citizens gazed and gaped at these startlingly handsome men and wondered who they were. They, however, walked into and straight through, three outer reception rooms, and into Jarasandha's presence. No one stopped them, as the custom in Rajagriha was that brahmins were allowed to cross the outer reception rooms and go straight in. As Krishna and the Pandava brothers were dressed as brahmins, no one stopped them.

They came and stood before Jarasandha, who stood up in respect and courtesy. He offered them gifts, flowers and fruit but Bhima and Arjuna never spoke a word to accept either the words of greeting, or the gifts. It was Krishna who told the king that his companions had taken a vow not to speak till midnight, "They will then speak to you." Jarasandha ordered that they should be housed comfortably.

Jarasandha had taken a vow that if, at any time, a brahmin wished to speak to him, the brahmin would not be denied, even if it was midnight. At midnight, Jarasandha came to the yajna hall where the so-called brahmins were. He asked them to sit down and then said to them that he was puzzled at the way they were dressed. Brahmins did not use scents or wear garlands of flowers. "I know perfectly well that householder-snataka brahmins do not wear such things. You say you are brahmins but you look like kshatriyas—you have the scars of the bow-string on your arms." He went on to say that he had been informed they had broken [through by the secret path and slipped into the city. "Why did you use these devious ways?" Who were they? Why had they come?

Krishna used most non-committal language, and did not explain who they were, or that they were not brahmins. As for entering secretly, he said, "Intelligent men do not enter an enemy's house by the main gate. That gate is meant for friends." He said they had taken a vow, that having pierced the enemy's defences, they would not leave without accomplishing their mission; neither would they accept any gifts or courtesies of welcome.

Jarasandha said he could not recollect ever having harmed them, why were they calling him their enemy? "How is it, brahmins, that you treat an innocent man as an enemy. I have never broken the kshatriya code and dharma."

Krishna said that the head of a certain royal family had commanded them to come here. As for his being innocent and never having gone against dharma and the kshatriya code, this was nonsense. Had he not broken the code when he treated other kshatriya rulers, not just as rulers who have been defeated, but kept them prisoners? They had been tortured and now he, Jarasandha, had sworn to sacrifice them to Rudra-Shiva. Who had ever heard of such a thing? That a

kshatriya-ruler should go in for human sacrifice was intolerable. "If we accept this sin of yours, King, then we too are tainted by it."

Krishna went on to say that they had a duty to protect dharma. He said it was unthinkable to sacrifice humans to a deity. He must be a fool to have even thought of treating humans as if they were mere animals. Their duty was to help those who were suffering and who were being mistreated. "All actions bear fruit; as is the action, so is the fruit." They were here to kill him, because he had killed their kinsmen and because his action, if tolerated any longer, would be a disgrace to their individual dignity as kshatriyas. Then he said, he was Krishna of a Vrishni clan, and these two, Bhima and Arjuna, of the Pandavas. "We challenge you—either free the captive kings, or die."

Jarasandha refused to accept Krishna's arguments that he was wrong in keeping the rulers captive. He said the Kshatriya code allowed the conqueror to do what he liked with the defeated. "Do not think you can frighten me. I shall not release the captive rulers."

He wanted to know if the challenge meant battles between armies, or single combat, or did all three wish to fight him?

Krishna said, "Which of us three would you like to fight?" And Jarasandha chose Bhima.

Krishna always acted in the best interests of those who depended on him—first it was the Yadavas, and now it was the Pandavas. He was not just a divinity and a philosopher. He was the advisor of the Yadavas, a friend of the Pandavas. In a harsh and brutal environment, he used his fine mind to the best means, with the least damage to his friends and relatives, to achieve the ends required.

Each occasion found him using a different method. If devious words were required in the realm of diplomacy, he used

them but, invariably, a sword flash of annihilating truth found a place in anything he said on such occasions. He summed up the reactions, and the psychology, of those he had to face. He knew that Jarasandha was bound to choose to fight Bhima because he looked the most formidable, powerful and physically strong. In his impetuosity, Jarasandha would forget that Bhima was a very much younger man, and would have more stamina in a prolonged fight.

The two reasons why Krishna did not put himself forward to fight Jarasandha were that, psychologically, he was at a disadvantage, as Jarasandha had already defeated him in battle, though that was many years ago. The other was, that a death by Krishna's hands might have meant a blessing, since Krishna was the redeemer. Jarasandha was cruel and brutal so his death had to be brutal and final. He would have to take the consequences of his own actions. There was little in his life to be a redeeming factor, sufficient to give him the grace of redemption. He was given a chance when the release of the rulers was asked, but he refused, and lost in the final choice.

Krishna knew that if they were to destroy Jarasandha, every and any means had to be used. Within that context, he was as scrupulous as possible.

Yudhisthira was a man of dharma. He never did anything unkind or wrong. His every action was according to dharma, and he did try, in every way possible, to be a wise and good ruler. His subjects were happy under his rule. If he became the Chakravartin, the absolute ruler, dharma would return into the everyday lives of the people.

Under a ruler like Jarasandha, with an arrogant, foul-mouthed, ill-mannered man like Sishupala as commander of his armies, dharma could not be a part of life and living. Minds could, under brutal power, be shocked into a numb

acquiescence with dharma or any thought of it, wiped out. Krishna wanted positive thinking to return into the lives of people, and so people like Jarasandha had to be defeated and removed from earth—Earth-Prithvi, who was weeping for help against the stifling air of despotism.

Rajagriha was an enormous town, or city, at the time of the Mahabharata. To get into it secretly was no mean challenge and required great ingenuity. Even today, when one looks at the colossal stones of the ruined outer walls, it is impressive. The hills are still there, and on one of them, is the ruin of an enormous platform. Tradition says it was part of Jarasandha's palace.

Jarasandha and Bhima agreed to a wrestling match, but this obviously was of a kind that allowed all types of hitting, kicking, slapping, as well as the usual holds, twists and throws.

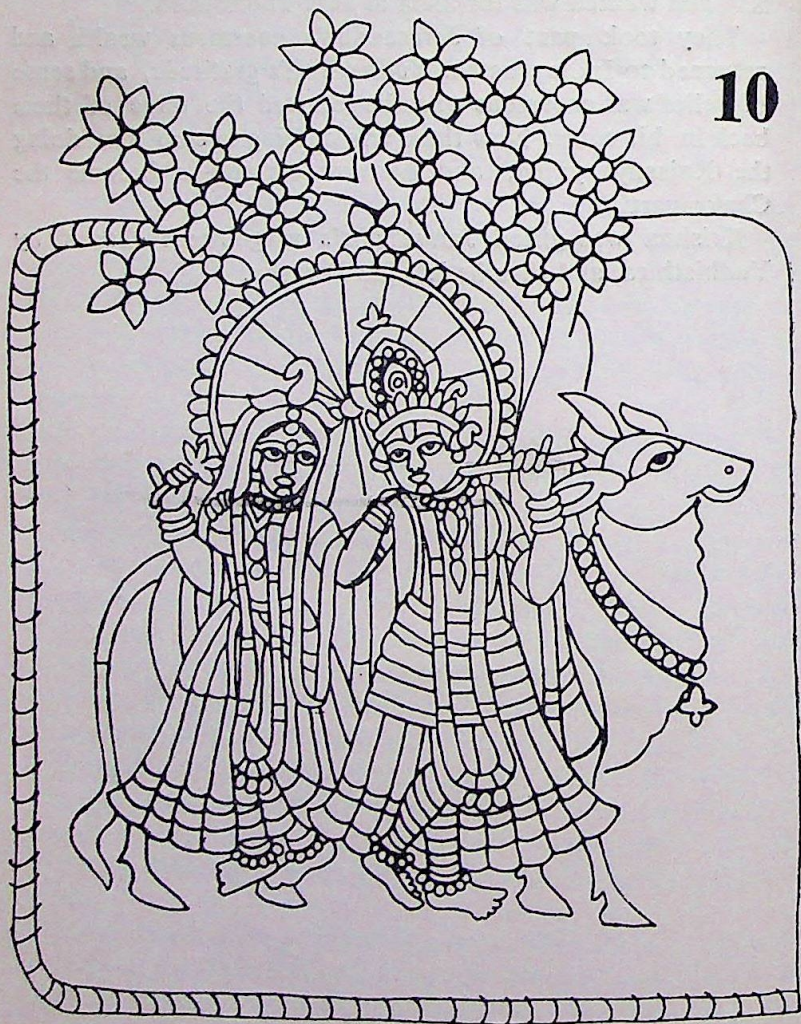
They are supposed to have fought for fourteen days and nights without any rest. On the fourteenth day, Jarasandha showed signs of tiredness. It was then that Krishna, through signs, pointed out to Bhima, that this was when he must use his utmost strength, as the enemy was tiring. Bhima first tried to break his back, but when he did not succeed, he whirled him round and round, and flung him to the ground. Then, by holding Jarasandha's leg down by putting his foot on it, Bhima tore him apart—thereby, once again, reinforcing the old story about Jarasandha having been joined together; this was his physical weakness and so Bhima was able to easily tear him apart.

After Jarasandha's death, his son came to them, trembling and in terror, but Krishna reassured him and installed him as the ruler. Before they left Rajagriha, they released the captive rulers. The grateful kings offered their everything to Krishna. "Ask for whatever you want, Krishna." But all that

Krishna wanted was for them to help Yudhisthira.

They took part of Jarasandha's enormous wealth and returned to Indraprastha. Yudhisthira's gratitude, and sense of relief was enormous when he received the three of them back in his court. Now there was nothing to stop him doing the Rajasuya yajna, and he was certain to become the Chakravartin.

Krishna was gifted Jarasandha's magnificent chariot by Yudhisthira, and then he left for Dwarka.



*K*rishna returned to Dwarka, and the four Pandavas, in turn, went in four directions, north, south, east and west to conquer in the name of Yudhisthira. They had to make the rulers agree to accept his suzerainty, and give vast wealth from their treasuries to the Pandavas.

Years went by, as they spread out all over the country and beyond its geographical boundaries. Yudhisthira devoted himself to being the kindest of rulers. His taxes were just, his officials incorruptible. The rains came plentifully in time, the land prospered.

After the four brothers had all returned, Yudhisthira consulted everybody about whether it was not time now to hold the Rajasuya yajna. While they were still debating on the matter, Krishna arrived.

This time he came in the formal capacity of a trusted ally

and friend. He brought an enormous amount of wealth as a gift to King Yudhisthira. He offered help in every way and kind. He had brought a large army with him, and it camped outside the city limits under his father, Vasudeva.

Then, instructed by Krishna, the Pandavas began to build pavilions and small palaces to house their endless number of guests, vassals, allies, brahmins, merchants and people of all kinds, who would be coming.

The arrangements for the yajna took over a year. The Kuru king and Bhishma, all the cousins of the Kuru line also came. Everyone offered to help because whatever help is given for and during a yajna, some of that merit, and good fortune, comes to those who help. Kings brought jewels and coins saying, "May you prosper, King, with these gifts we bring you." Krishna humbled himself to the extent of washing the feet of the brahmins attending the function. Veda Vyasa came and was the presiding priest of the yajna.

Narada Muni had also come. As he sat in the hall and looked at all these numerous kings, dazzling in their beautiful clothes, their sparkling jewels, and their power and manliness, an awful sense of doom came over him. He thought to himself, yes, Narayana had told the gods to be born on earth—to go there, kill, be killed and return to heaven. These kings looked like gods—they are the gods. There is such an effulgence about them that they cannot be anything else. And are they all about to be destroyed, all about to die? Narada Muni whispered prayers to Narayana.

The yajna ceremony was ready to begin. The brahmins had been given fabulous gifts of gold coins and cattle, clothes and blankets. Then it was the turn of the visiting great men and kings to be honoured. Bhishma pointed out to Yudhisthira that the formal *arghya* ceremony should now be done to the "foremost among those present". Yudhisthira asked his

advice as to who should be considered the "foremost". Bhishma said, "Krishna, of course," and the youngest Pandava, Sahadeva, performed the ceremony in the correct manner. Krishna accepted the honour done him.

Among the rulers and princes present at the yajna, was Sishupala, once commander of Jarasandha's armies. He was furious, and said they had all been insulted. How could Krishna be considered the foremost among those present, when he was not even a king? "Is he the greatest among your well-wishers? Is he the eldest; what of his father? Is he your teacher, your acharya; what of Drona?" And so Sishupala went down the line of accusations and each time he asked, how is Krishna greater than this person or that? He turned on Krishna and accused him of being a total ignorant for accepting *arghya* when he should have known that there were others more qualified, and better fitted, to accept the honour.

The quarrel got worse when Sishupala stood up and was followed by a few more rulers, who did not like Krishna being given the greatest honour.

Yudhisthira went to Sishupala, spoke diplomatic and soothing words but Sishupala was not to be quietened. Bhishma then spoke up for Krishna, saying, "Why should not Krishna get this honour?" He knew all the Vedas and the other allied subjects of the Vedas, he was strong in the knowledge of arms. There was hardly a king there who had not been defeated, some time or the other, by Krishna. He had all the qualities required of a man who is honoured, for he had humility and gentleness, he was brave yet shrewd, he always used his intelligence, he was enterprising. Success was always Krishna's.

Sishupala still would not listen. Sahadeva made a spirited defence of his action, and threatened to stamp on the head of any king who criticised their decision, and the choice.

Yudhisthira spoke to Bhishma asking for his advice, for he did not want his yajna ruined by any quarrels, fights or harsh words. Sishupala continued thundering out more accusations. Bhishma said he thought Sishupala had gone a bit mad—"It seems that all those who wish to be destroyed by Krishna, first go a little mad." Sishupala overheard this, and flamed into a tirade against Bhishma calling him old, senile and inept. He abused Krishna again, for getting into Jarasandha's palace by guile, and having him killed in a non-kshatriya manner.

Bhishma answered by saying that Sishupala had brayed like an ass at the time of his birth and his parents were frightened by the ill omen. Then he told the assemblage of kings that Sishupala was Krishna's cousin, and he was born with an extra pair of hands and a third eye. The parents were thinking of throwing the child away when a prediction was made that he would grow into a strong, handsome and powerful man. Also, that his extra hands would drop off and the third eye close, when he was touched by the person who would eventually kill him.

Bhishma went on to say that people from all over came to see this extraordinary child. One day Krishna, too, came to see his new cousin. The aunt, laughing at the sight of a baby cousin and a grown-up cousin together, put the child in Krishna's lap. Immediately the third eye closed and the hands fell off. Terrified, his aunt begged Krishna to forgive him a hundred faults. "Maybe he will offend you any number of times but forgive him a hundred faults." Bhishma said, "I know Krishna will destroy him, so let him say what he likes to me."

There was more and more confusion in the Hall. Bhima was furious and Bhishma was busy soothing him, keeping him from precipitating an irrevocable situation.

Sishupala said insulting things both about Bhishma and Krishna. He sneered at all these "chants of praise about Krishna." He called Krishna a few more names and challenged him to fight.

All this time, through all this confusion, accusations, tempers, gestures and shouting, Krishna had kept quiet. He had said nothing, done nothing, except once he had restrained Arjuna. Now he sat up, straightened himself, glanced round and spoke to the kings. There was total silence while he told them that Sishupala was the son of Vasudeva's sister. He was a disgrace to their family, he said Krishna's family had never harmed him but he had done them a great deal of harm. He had raided and sacked Dwarka while Krishna was away. He had stolen the yajna horse, he had abducted virtuous wives, he had raped his own maternal cousin. His wickednesses were innumerable. Sishupala had been forgiven by Krishna so far, only because of the promise, and his given word to his aunt but today his insults were more than he, Krishna, could take any more.

Sishupala jeered about Krishna's wife, Rukmini, saying why did Krishna not tell the kings here that his wife was actually betrothed to him, Sishupala, when Krishna did the *haran* and stole Rukmini away? Sishupala sneered that he did not care whether Krishna was angry or friendly, whether he forgave him or not—he was not a king in any case, and once again he abused him in foul language.

Krishna stood up, and facing the kings he told them that now the hundred faults were over, and he was going to kill Sishupala. He turned and looked at Sishupala, the famous Chakra flashed through the air and Sishupala's body fell, decapitated, on the floor.

The death of Sishupala is one of the much discussed

episodes of Krishna's life.

For Sishupala to be killed by Krishna, on the very material level, was an obvious necessity. The whole yajna was being ruined by his rudeness and recalcitrance. He was inciting other rulers against Bhishma, the Pandavas and Krishna. He was weakening the newly-made Chakravartin's imperial status and power, by publicly questioning his action. He was inciting treachery by making petty rulers jealous. He was a danger and needed to be removed. After all, Sishupala had been Jarasandha's commander and Jarasandha had been considered invincible, and here was the same brood raising its head again. Besides all this, he was an arch-enemy of dharma. He was always abducting unwilling women; he was cruel, brash, arrogant, powerful and definitely as strong as an anti-god. So, he had to be removed, for the sake of the Pandavas, for the sake of dharma, good government and the peace of people.

There is also a story behind it. One day, Durvasa Munī went to the highest heaven to visit Narayana. His two doorkeepers, Jai and Vijaya, did not let him enter immediately, and so were cursed. When Narayana asked for some kind of reprieve for them, Durvasa offered them the choice, "Either seven births as Vishnu's devotees or three births as his enemies." They chose the three births, so they went through, being first, the brothers Hiranya-aksa and Hiranya-kasipu, then Ravana and his brother Kumbhakarna, and now Kamsa and Sishupala.

When Sishupala died, a flame left his body, touched the feet of Krishna and then melted into Krishna's body. The curse was over.

When Sishupala died, the sudden revolt of the kings died, too, for they realised that Krishna was all powerful. There was fear in the hearts of some of them, and joy in the hearts of others. Sishupala's body was removed from the sacred pre-

cints, and Yudhisthira ordered a proper funeral for him. His young son was made king of the Chedis.

The attending brahmins and priests pronounced mantras blessing Krishna. The yajna was now protected by Krishna. The priests poured oblations into the *homa*-fire and Sahadeva completed the ceremony of *arghya* to Krishna.

While the yajna was being performed by the priests, the guests were feted and fed. Whenever a lakh of brahmins sat down to eat, conch shells blared out the happy information. Rice and ghee, rice cooked in sweetened milk was served. There was not one person who was neglected. Nowhere was there a hungry person, or someone who did not get a gift, or some comfort.

The glittering function was at last over, the guests asked permission to leave. Krishna, also, wanted to go to Dwarka now, for he had been away for over a year. The Pandava brothers paid due courtesies to the departing kings, but to say goodbye to Krishna was sad. Once again, Yudhisthira could not find words to thank him. He was overwhelmed by his feelings of gratitude. Again the brothers went through the ceremonies of homage, blessings and farewell. Krishna told Yudhisthira to remember his now imperial status. "Look after your subjects. May you prosper." And so he left.

Duryodhana had stayed on after all the guests had gone. He wanted to see the famous Assembly Hall, constructed by Maya Danava, properly and go all over it. He was wandering around and he came to a place where the floor was made of crystal. Thinking it was water, he lifted his clothes; he carefully put his foot on it, and was mortified at his stupid mistake. In another place, a pool was full of flowers made of crystal, and Duryodhana thought it was firm ground and fell in.

Attendants rushed forward to help him out, fresh, dry

clothes were brought but Bhima, Arjuna and the Twins roared with laughter.

Duryodhana, a proud and arrogant prince, felt most humiliated. But worse was to happen. He tried to step through a crystal door and banged stars into his head. This time, even the servants and attendants could not help laughing, and the four Pandava brothers rocked with laughter. There is a traditional story that Draupadi saw it happen and Duryodhana heard her laugh, though he did not actually see her.

It was all too much for Duryodhana. Seething with anger, jealous of Yudhisthira's imperial status, envious of the enormous wealth he had seen, his senses screaming in frustration, he left for home and Hastinapur.

It was his grumbles, his tirades, his total despondency, that led to the hatching of the plot against the Pandava brothers. Yudhisthira was challenged to the game of luck which he lost.

The challenge to a game of luck, played with dice, was, a kind of a non-warring challenge of war. It could not be refused by a kshatriya warrior, for it would have meant cowardice in the face of a challenge. Any kind of challenge had to be faced, regardless of the type or the cost.

Eventually, when the brothers had been gambled away by Yudhisthira, he staked his wife and lost her as well. He had already staked and lost his kingdom, his wealth and himself. So they were all in the possession of the Kurus.

Draupadi was dragged into the main Sabha hall by Duryodhana's brother. He hauled her in by her beautiful night-black hair and flung her on the floor. Duryodhana exposed his thigh and gestured to her to come and sit there. She was dressed in a single garment, just a single sari, for she was in her menstrual period.

In those days, and till very recent times, a woman stayed

separate, away from everybody and wore just one piece of unstitched cloth, or a sari during menstruation. She never appeared before any man at this time. Under these circumstances, for Draupadi to have been dragged into the presence of all the men of her husbands' family was the most terrible humiliation and insult. It was cruel and totally horrifying.

When Duryodhana's brother, Dushasana, was trying to strip Draupadi naked, and Karna was making jeering remarks ordering her to be stripped, and calling her a harlot because she had five husbands, and while Duryodhana was making lewd and obscene gestures, tradition says, Draupadi prayed to Krishna to come to her help. She held on to one end of her trailing sari and, weeping, prayed and prayed, but no Krishna came. Then, in total agony of spirit, she left her clothes, she joined her hands, and she prayed. While she was praying, Dushasana pulled at her sari, and the more he pulled, the more cloth appeared, till he was so exhausted that he sat down on the floor in frustrated anger.

Whether a miracle took place, or whether there were many yards of cloth in her sari, the story about the sari being unending due to the power of Krishna, is to illustrate the maxim that only when total dedication is given to Krishna, or the Lord, does he appear or help. It is only when Draupadi's hands leave her garment, and join together in homage and humility to pray, that Krishna comes to her help.

This Vaishnavite moral is brought out in the story of Krishna stealing the gopis' clothes and returning the garments only when they came to him with hands joined in prayed submission of the spirit.

Garments, and clothes, are taken as being symbolic of outward attributes, and the holds of life. They are what cover a person in the involvement of hatred, fear, pride and anger.

Only in total humility could Draupadi forget her tortured

anguish. The stripping of Draupadi is the most horrifying depiction of the moral, which can be seen in innumerable Pahari miniatures and paintings of Krishna and the gopis, after he has stolen their garments. They stand in the water, half naked, while he plays the flute. Or they are coming out of the water, near naked, with their hands joined, and Krishna laughs.

When Draupadi wept and prayed, tradition says, Krishna covered her with the garment of dharma, swathes and swathes of cloth.

The Pandava and Kuru uncle, Vidura, forced the issue and persuaded Duryodhana's father to speak and stop this unseemly, ungentlemanly scene. The Pandavas were given their freedom. They left for home but Duryodhana bullied, badgered and persuaded the old King to allow him to call the Pandavas back, in the King's name, for another bout of gambling.

Yudhisthira returned, played the unfair game, lost the bet and they had to leave for exile and life in the forest for twelve years, and one year more, incognito, for this was the stake.

The story of the Mahabharata moves, from the smouldering embers of anger, into the flaming holocaust of the war and battle of Kurukshetra. The cause was Duryodhana's enormous envy and jealousy and his desire to rule the whole kingdom. But behind it was Duryodhana's own feeling of inadequacy where the Pandava brothers were concerned. This envy and jealousy were deep-rooted and self-destroying.

Karna is Duryodhana's firm ally from the time he gifted him a kingdom, when Arjuna refused Karna's challenge because Karna was not a prince or a ruler of a kingdom. The gift of a kingdom did not help on that particular occasion, since the public humiliation had already taken place. The second

time Karna, the son of a charioteer and a Suta by caste, is humiliated is when Draupadi, at her swayamvara, loudly announces she will not marry the son of Suta, and Karna has to go back without accepting the challenge to show his skill at archery. On the day the Pandavas lost the gambling match, and Draupadi is brought into the open hall, Karna gets his own back. He mocks and insults Draupadi when she is helpless, shamed, and the Pandavas are unable to help her in any way because they, themselves, are now gambled away as slaves to the Kurus.

If there is one subject which, in Indian mores, leads to murderous anger, it is the ill-treatment of their womenfolk by another. The men of a family may treat their womenfolk in as horrible a manner as can be imagined but, should an outsider do so, there is a holocaust, in however major, minor, or modern a term, it might be.

The Kuru princes and Karna's behaviour towards Draupadi were as much a cause of the flames of war as politics and imperial status, between the Kurus and the Pandavas.

One can, of course, also say that the society at the time was also in a process of disintegration because of warring ambitious rulers; because of wars and more wars, and cruelty; because the earth wept in torment and Krishna had come to help her.

Certainly, from a purely historic point of view, Krishna's role was very important in that period. His authority, his shrewdness, his diplomatic acumen, and the enormous Yadava fighting machinery of men and material, was very much a balancing factor. His genuine affection for the Pandavas, his friendship with Arjuna and his understanding of their problems was sympathetic and always helpful.

All these things combined, made Duryodhana less than tolerant towards the Pandavas. He was determined to wipe them

out politically, or even physically, if possible. Earlier, he had tried to poison them, incinerate them in a house made of lac and, till the actual war of Kurukshetra took place, had tried, many times, to destroy them.

Karna's character is complex. As he finds out that he, in actual fact, is not a charioteer's son but an out-of-wedlock child of a Pandava mother, his burning resentment against life is typified by the Pandavas, particularly Arjuna, who is the nearest to him in skill of arms, and probably, also, in looks and physique. It was Arjuna who won Draupadi's hand at the swayamvara, while she called Karna "son of a Suta". It was Arjuna who refused to accept his challenge, when as young men, their guru held the celebration, graduating them from being novices to being warriors. Karna's humiliations had led him to vow he would never refuse to give a gift, until this gift-giving became an arrogant assertion.

Veda Vyasa has inserted another mocking story which has more than one interpretation. He has written in the Mahabharata that Indra came disguised as a brahmin to Karna to ask for a gift. Karna never refused a brahmin any gift that he asked for. When Indra asked for the "impenetrable armour which Karna was born with", Karna had to cut into his flesh to remove this armour. Veda Vyasa has mocked Karna's arrogance about his own generosity in giving gifts—any gift, even that of cutting his very flesh.

But there is another interpretation of this story as well. This armour was the armour of yoga—a particular stage of yoga, and Veda Vyasa laughs at the folly and arrogance of a man who would give away the armour of yoga to Indra, who is lord of the senses, in any case. Therefore, from the invincibility of yoga-detachment, Karna becomes vulnerable. His later vulgar rantings and his end proved it.

It is important in the story of Krishna to remember these

twisted strands, and these people who were so involved in Krishna's life. Krishna had compassion and pity, but none for blatant chicanery.

When the Pandavas were leaving Hastinapur after the fatal dice game, they left their mother, Kunti, with their uncle Vidura. They then went into the forest to begin their twelve years of exile. Krishna was away warring with Salya, Sishupala's brother, when the Pandavas were invited to Hastinapur and challenged to the game of dice.

He met them when they were already in the forest. He was outraged at their treatment at the hands of Duryodhana. He said that malicious schemers deserved to be killed and the earth would drink the blood of these evil men.

The Andhakas and Yudhisthira's other powerful allies all came to meet the Pandavas in the forest. There they took a vow that, one day, they would kill the whole lot of these people who had insulted the Pandavas.

Krishna was very upset and his normal equanimity was shaken. Over and over again, he regretted the fact that he did not know about the dice game, or he would have stopped it. Even if he had not been invited, he said, still he would have gone and persuaded, argued, or in some manner or means forced them to stop the game. Krishna was fiercely angry about the whole affair. He said to Arjuna, "You and I are one. What is mine is yours. Whoever hates you, hates me. Whatever or whoever wounds you, also wounds me."

While the Pandavas and Krishna were sitting and talking Draupadi came in and told Krishna about her terrible humiliation. "I trembled and wept, I begged not to be taken into the presence of the Kuru elders, but I was dragged there. Krishna, I had on a single garment, I was unclean. And there in the blood-spotted garment, they dragged me. How did they dare do such a thing, Krishna? Am I not your Sakhi and

friend? I am the wife of the Pandavas, the great warrior Dhritadyumna's sister."

Draupadi's condemnatory accusations are one of the most heart-wrenching moments of the Mahabharata. Finally, in a tear-thickened voice she says, "Having everyone, I have no one. Even you sit in silence. You must help me, Krishna, for am I not your Sakhi?"

The word "Sakhi" is usually used between two women friends but, if used in a man-woman relationship, it puts the relations between them at a level where the fullest tenderness is expected. The sexual tension of attraction between a man and a woman is transcended into a loving and protective attitude on the part of the man. It is as if a woman shelters inside his heart and lives there safe and protected just as she would, were she in a cave, while a storm raged outside.

It is this aspect of Krishna which gives him the name, Param Sakha, in the spiritual sense.

Draupadi appealed to Krishna by saying. "I am your Sakhi," rather than, "You are my Sakha." The onus was his to accept the relationship and the obligation. It was an appeal to his sense of chivalry.

Krishna promised to help the Pandavas in every way possible, doing whatever was in his power. Then he told Draupadi, "The skies will fall, the Himalayas shatter but what I promise you will not fail to happen. The wives of those with whom you are angry will weep as widows over the bodies of their husbands."

Arjuna consoled her by saying, "Lovely lady, do not cry, what Krishna says will happen."

Then the various great warriors who had come to visit the Pandavas, took terrible vows of how they would kill the main characters of the horrible scene in the Sabha, where Draupadi

had been so humiliated and insulted.

Later, when Yudhisthira and he were sitting together, Krishna said, "Lusting, gambling, hunting and drinking are the four evils that lead to ruin. And gambling is the worst, for it leads to the loss of what one has, or might have in the future. It leads to quarrels and bitterness." Then he explained why he had been absent and how Salya had attacked Dwarka while Krishna was still with Yudhisthira at Indraprastha. He had killed some of the young chiefs and attacked, shouting, "Where is that scoundrel Krishna, son of Vasudeva! I shall kill him for daring to kill Sishupala." He very nearly defeated the Yadavas at Dwarka, but Krishna's son had saved the day.

When Krishna returned to Dwarka, he saw the ruined gardens, met the grieving people and heard all that had happened. He had to take action against Salya and there had been a tremendous battle. Salya had a flying chariot and he fled to the edge of the ocean. Krishna followed him there and saw him resplendent in his splendid chariot. What a battle it had been! Salya used every type of missile against him from this flying chariot. A smoke screen, mists, fog, surrounded Salya, he could not be seen but the weapons flew through the air and hit Krishna's charioteer, Daruka, till he could hardly handle the horses any more. And then Daruka had shouted "Shoot, shoot your arrow now, there he is," and Krishna had shot terrible fire-tipped arrows, but still Salya fought on. Krishna finally used his Chakra. He had chanted mantras and hurled it with all the strength of his arm, and the wonderful weapon blazed through the sky. Only then did Salya fall, sliced through, crashing down like a giant pine tree struck by lightning. "This is why I could not be with you, that day in Hastinapur. Had I been there, either nothing that occurred would have happened, or Duryodhana would have been

dead by now. And now it is too late."

Sadly Yudhisthira said, "Yes, now it is too late. We shall have to wait the years."

Krishna left, taking Subhadra and her son Abhimanyu, with him. After Krishna left, Draupadi's brother took her five sons with him, and Nakula's wife also left with her brother. Then the Pandavas left this place for another forest and their thirteen years of exile.

There is a traditional story that Yudhisthira's family priest advised him to do *tapas* to Surya, the Sun god, for favour of a boon by which he would always have enough food to feed the number of brahmins who had followed him into the forest, to keep him company during his exile.

Surya had given him a pot which would remain full of food, as long as Draupadi had not eaten.

During the period of their exile, the Pandavas were, on more than one occasion, harassed by the Kuru cousins. Once, they persuaded Durvasa Muni with his vast entourage of disciples, to visit the Pandavas. And they so managed it that Durvasa arrived, hungry and tired, late in the afternoon. Draupadi had fed all the brahmins and her husbands, and had just finished eating her own food, when Durvasa arrived.

There was absolute consternation, and Draupadi was filled with terror, as there was absolutely no food to serve them anything. She prayed to Krishna who appeared before her. "What shall I do, Krishna, help me."

Krishna said, "Where is that pot of yours?" Draupadi explained the position. He said, "Never mind, bring it."

Luckily it had not yet been cleaned, and there, inside it, was just one grain of left-over, cooked, rice. Krishna picked out that one grain, and saying, "May all the hungers of those who are hungry be satisfied," put the rice in his mouth and

ate it.

Durvasa Muni and his disciples had gone to bathe in the river. As they came out, and were changing their clothes, that was the instant Krishna ate the grain of rice and as he said, "I am satisfied," the whole lot with Durvasa Muni, including him, belched loudly and felt completely full.

They said to each other, "How can we return there, and then refuse to eat, for we are absolutely full?" So they decided to run away, and all was well with Draupadi and the Pandavas.

Krishna came to visit the Pandavas once more, during their exile. He was distressed to see how they were living, and he advised that Yudhisthira should fight with Duryodhana and take back his own kingdom. But Yudhisthira refused. He said a person's given word was his conception of dharma. For the sake of his own convenience, he could not break his word and come out from his exile of a forest hermit's life.

Krishna even offered to fight the Pandava's battle for them, while Yudhisthira continued his life in exile. For, as Krishna pointed out, "They are getting stronger and you are getting weaker." Yudhisthira would not agree and put forward the same plea.

Some years later, when Yudhisthira was going to all the various places of pilgrimage, he came to Pravasa, which was near Dwarka. Here all the Yadavas pleaded with him to stand up to Duryodhana, fight and win back his kingdom. They even suggested that he let Arjuna's son, Abhimanyu, rule while he kept his vow in the forest. Again Yudhisthira refused to break his word.

In the thirteenth year of their exile, when the Pandavas were living in disguise in King Virata's kingdom, the Kurus attacked the kingdom. Arjuna fought and defeated them and when the king offered his daughter in marriage to Arjuna, he

accepted her as his daughter-in-law. The end of this battle was also the end of the thirteenth year of the Pandavas' exile. Now they sent word to Krishna, who came to Virata's kingdom with Abhimanyu, for the wedding with Virata's daughter, Uttara.

After the wedding Krishna, his clan members, Yudhisthira's loyal friends and rulers of various kingdoms, sat in council to discuss how they would set about restoring the Pandavas to their own kingdom. The council decided, at Krishna's advice, to send a trusted priest as a messenger to the Kurus, to ask for the return of their kingdom to the Pandavas. At the same time, they were to send news to their friends and allies to gather in the Virata kingdom, in case Duryodhana refused, and there had to be war.

While the priest was on his way to Hastinapur, Duryodhana's spies brought news to him about this, and also that Krishna had returned to Dwarka.

Duryodhana went to Dwarka on his fastest horse. Arjuna was also on his way to Dwarka and the two cousins arrived there at the same time. Duryodhana went straight to Krishna's palace and apartments. Krishna was sleeping, so he sat down to wait on a chair near the head of Krishna's bed. Arjuna came in, and sat on the floor at Krishna's feet.

When Krishna opened his eyes, the first person he saw was Arjuna, and after that he looked at Duryodhana. When he had said the usual courteous welcoming phrases, Krishna asked why they had come. Duryodhana said it was only proper that he, Krishna, should help him in the impending war, if there was one, because he had come first, "Our ancestors have always honoured those who came first and asked for something."

Krishna smiled and said that even if he had come first, it was Arjuna whom he had seen first. In any case, he was the

younger of the two and had the right to make the first choice. "I offer my Narayani forces to one side and myself, totally unarmed, to the other. I shall not bear arms, I shall not fight."

Arjuna chose Krishna. Duryodhana went home, delighted that he would have the terrible Narayani forces who were sworn to fight their utmost to death.

When Duryodhana left, Krishna asked Arjuna why he had chosen him, alone and unarmed. Arjuna said, "What would our lives be without you, Krishna?" He was sure they would be able to kill all the Kurus, but he wanted to have Krishna as his charioteer. Krishna agreed.

In the meanwhile, the messenger reached Hastinapur and put forward the plea that, since Pandu and Dhritarashtra were brothers, half the kingdom should be given to the Pandavas.

The elder Kurus were still talking about non-war and peace, when Karna rudely interrupted with angry words. There was a good deal of confusion and, eventually, Sanjaya was sent to the Pandavas, as messenger from the Kurus, saying "Let there be peace."

Yudhisthira replied that he did not want war, but wanted his kingdom and Indraprastha back. Sanjaya talked about sin and forbearance, and Yudhisthira turned to Krishna to give the right answer.

Krishna said, "I desire the welfare and well being of the Pandavas. I also want the Kurus to be happy. I think it would be best for me to go to Hastinapur, and see if I cannot obtain a peace which does not hurt the interests of the Pandavas. If I succeed, I shall have saved the Kurus from the jaws of death. And do not try to preach to the Pandavas about good sense. When Draupadi was being insulted in open court not one of you opened your mouths to help her. But I shall come to Hastinapur."

Yudhisthira sent Sanjaya back with the final appeal, "We are five. Give us at least five villages. But I am prepared for war and ready for peace."

After Sanjaya left, Yudhisthira was still not happy about the issue and turned to Krishna for advice. When Krishna said he would definitely go to Hastinapur and do his best for the Pandavas. Yudhisthira was worried about Krishna's safety. Telling him not to worry, for if the Kurus harmed him, a messenger of peace, he would burn them to ashes, Krishna said, "Still, duty demands that we make the utmost efforts for peace."

When Krishna was to leave, Draupadi came to see him. "For thirteen years I have suppressed my anger. There can be no peace with honour with the Kurus." She swore that her father, or her sons, headed by Abhimanyu, would fight. She could not forget her humiliation and insult.

Krishna did his best to console her, saying that he was certain the Kurus would not agree but still, it was but right, correct, and in line with dharma, to try for peace.

Krishna was greeted with lavish hospitality from the time he entered the Kuru kingdom. The old king wanted Krishna to be given enormous gifts, "so that he will be pleased". But Vidura warned him. "You cannot bribe Krishna. The Pandavas have asked for only five villages, and if you do not give them even these, how will you have peace? And give up all thought of bribing Krishna. You cannot separate him from Arjuna."

Duryodhana had a brilliant idea! He would capture and imprison Krishna, "and that will be the end of the Pandavas!" The whole court was horrified. Even the foolish old king, his doting father, had to speak against this. It would be a foolish and unforgiveable act to hurt Krishna, who was coming as an ambassador to seek peace.

Krishna arrived the next day, and the welcoming crowd was so thick that his chariot could move only very slowly down the road. He went to the King's palace first. Later, he went to visit the Pandava mother, who was living with Vidura, and then went to call on Duryodhana. When he was asked to dine there, Krishna smiled and said, "One should only eat with one's friends, and only if one is in great need, with one's enemies. Duryodhana, I am not in need. I shall stay and dine with Vidura. If my mission is successful, and my work completed, you may give a feast and I shall be happy to dine with you."

Next day, Krishna went to the Kuru hall. He said, "I have come for peace." He explained the Pandava stand; he begged the Kurus to be reasonable. He pleaded with the old king, "Treat them like your own sons, and the Pandavas will give you more honour and respect than you can possibly even want. Do not bring ruin upon your people."

The King said he was helpless and his sons would not listen to him, "I entreat you, advise Duryodhana."

Krishna tried to be as persuasive as he could and ended up by saying to Duryodhana. "Give them half your kingdom. Let your father remain king, you can be the heir apparent, but give the Pandavas their share."

Duryodhana was adamant. Why should the Pandavas have half the kingdom? "When I was young, the elders did us grievous wrong in giving part of the kingdom to them, to which they had no right whatsoever. I do not know why they gave it. But I have done nothing wrong. They lost the dice game, they lost their kingdom. I will not give them anything, not even as much land as will cover the point of a needle. I am blameless, Krishna. Just because of your fondness for the Pandavas, you keep finding fault with me."

No persuasion, no angry words by Krishna, no pointing

out of his disgraceful behaviour towards Draupadi, could change Duryodhana. His mother came, his father dithered and scolded. Nothing was of any avail. Duryodhana walked out of the court.

Vidura heard from Satyaki, Krishna's friend and guard, that Duryodhana and his friends were planning to capture Krishna. Krishna was told but he laughed and, asking permission, walked out of the king's assembly hall, holding Satyaki's hand.

By this gesture of holding Satyaki's hand, Krishna wished to point out that his own right hand holding Satyaki's left hand, would not be raised in anger against the Kurus, for he was an ambassador, but Satyaki's right hand was free, which he could use, and use with any weapon, to guard Krishna.

As Krishna was getting into his chariot to leave, the old king pointed out to him that he, the king, had no influence over his sons, and so he was helpless.

Krishna answered, "I did not want the world to say I did not try. I have tried for peace. The King says he is helpless, so I now go back to Yudhisthira."

As he was going away, Krishna asked Karna into his chariot. He told him the story of his birth and invited him to join the Pandavas. Karna acknowledged that he knew the story, but refused.

When the Pandava mother, Kunti, heard what had happened, and been said, in the King's court, she knew that war was now inevitable. She thought she would try and persuade Karna to leave the Kurus and join the Pandavas. She went to him while he was at his prayers on the banks of the Ganges. She told him the truth about his birth, that he was her child and born a kshatriya, that he should join the Pandavas and live happily with his five brothers.

But all this was much too late now. Karna did not agree. He

said the Kurus relied on him, he had lived on their kindness and friendship for years and now, at the time of tremendous crisis, he could not bring himself to let them down.

"Yet, I cannot let my mother plead in vain. You will always have five sons. Four of your sons I shall not kill but it will have to be Arjuna alive and me dead, or I alive and Arjuna dead."

The war was now inevitable. Duryodhana asked Bhishma to be the commander of his forces. The old man agreed but stipulated that he would not kill any of the Pandava brothers.

The great divisions, the armies with their chariots, elephants, horses and foot soldiers, gathered at Kurukshetra.

Balarama came to visit the Pandavas. He told them, "I have come because I have heard that all you great princes have allowed greed, anger and hatred to overwhelm you. I do not approve of this war. I cannot fight against either Bhima or Duryodhana, because both have been my pupils. Yudhisthira, the soil of this field will turn into liquid mud with the blood of warriors. It will be a horrible sight, it is doomed. I do not wish to see it. I do not wish to see the Kurus destroyed. I am going away on pilgrimage to holy places." Balarama left.

The next day, the armies stood ready for battle, like a wheat field ready for harvesting.

As Krishna had promised, he was driving Arjuna's chariot. Krishna had the reputation of being the finest chariot driver, invincible in battle, but he had said he would not fight during this battle.

When the armies were drawn up and the conch shells blown, the various musical instruments of war-like sounds began to signal to their respective armies, that the time to begin the battle had arrived. Arjuna looked at the armies and asked Krishna to drive the chariot to a place from

where he could see the people with whom he had to contend in battle.

Krishna took him to a place from where Arjuna could see his Grand-uncle, Bhishma, his Guru, Drona, and other senior warriors, as well as his Kuru cousins.

Then Krishna said to Arjuna, (to quote in translation, the *Gita*), "Observe Partha, these Kurus assembled."

Arjuna was addressed here as Partha, which means son of Pritha. Kunti, his mother was the daughter of Prithu, so she is known as Pritha, as well as Kunti.

The Bhagavadgita is the conversation between Krishna and Arjuna, and the teaching by Krishna, of the disciplines, or yoga, by which man should live.

When Arjuna looks at the Kuru armies, he sees his Grand-uncle Bhishma, who gave him the only father's love that Arjuna ever knew—and Arjuna knows he must kill him. He saw his Guru Drona, who had taught him from the time of his first bow and arrow—he, too, had to be killed. Arjuna looked at the Kuru army with its allies, and suddenly saw them as his relations, his erstwhile friends and companions, the loves of his childhood, those with whom he had shared so much, and Arjuna was distraught. His heart was filled with love and sentiments, and his kshatriya mind was overwhelmed by the emotions of the heart. He needed to learn the disciplines of living, and Krishna taught him.

This, in extreme brevity, is the story and the opening scene of the Bhagavadgita.

Before the battle began, the commanders of the combatant sides met and decided on the rules of war and conduct to be observed. Foot soldiers, or infantry, would fight against each other and horsemen against horsemen, and so on; only chariot fighters could fight with anyone, for they were the mobile unit. However, a charioteer was not to be attacked. Every day at

sunset, fighting would end and after that no one would attack each other.

With all these rules and laws agreed upon, the battle of Kurukshetra has any number of incidents when they were broken. However, it was considered shameful and Arjuna was one of those who always raised his voice against those who deliberately broke the code and conduct of war agreed upon.

Everyone was ready to shoot the first arrow when Yudhishthira came down from his chariot, took off his armour, laid his weapons aside, and began to walk towards the Kaurava army.

Arjuna was horrified. He thought that, perhaps, Yudhishthira was going to sue for peace at any price. His brothers and Krishna were following him as he walked fast to catch up with Yudhishthira. When he asked, "Why are you going into the enemy lines, and unarmed, at this time?" Yudhishthira neither looked at him nor spoke. It was Krishna who gave the answer, "He is going to ask for the blessings of the elder relations before the battle begins."

That is exactly what happened. Both Pitamaha Bhishma and Guru Drona blessed him. They both said, "We are under obligations to the King. We shall fight but victory shall be yours." Guru Drona gave the saddest condemnation of himself by adding, "Vested interests make slaves of us. We are no longer masters of our free selves."

The battle continued for eighteen days. On the first day the Pandavas suffered tremendous defeat. On the second day Bhishma was decimating the Pandava army. Arjuna turned to Krishna and said, "I will have to kill Bhishma, otherwise we will have no army left." Krishna said, "Then get ready", and drove the chariot straight towards Bhishma. It was a tremendous battle with the old warrior who was full of tricks

and stratagems. Bhishma shot arrows that hit Krishna and wounded him. This made Arjuna furious, and his arrows stung the old man but, as the combat became closer, Bhishma had to disengage and go to help the Kalingas, who were being pressed hard by Bhima and Satyaki. Then Satyaki's arrow hit Bhishma's charioteer and his horses bolted, carrying him away from the battle. As the sun set, the battle stopped and it was a jubilant Pandava army that laid down arms for the day.

On the third day, Krishna urged Arjuna to again engage Bhishma. "Be true to your decision and if you relax now, we are lost. The situation is critical."

Arjuna said, "Drive on", and rained shafts of arrows at Bhishma, cutting his bow into two. As he picked up another, Arjuna again cut it. But Bhishma was winning. Arjuna's heart was not in the fight. He could not forget that this was the much-loved Pitamaha, the "Grandfather".

Krishna once more warned Arjuna; then feeling that Arjuna would do nothing drastic against Bhishma, he jumped down from the chariot, saying, "I will kill him myself." Arjuna caught hold of Krishna and brought him back to the chariot, promising to fight more fiercely.

Each day the battle grew more and more fierce. Men fell by the thousands, and the description of the battlefield, as given in the Mahabharata, is horrifying and brilliantly descriptive.

On the seventh day, when Bhishma attacked Arjuna's son, Abhimanyu, Arjuna asked Krishna to turn quickly and head for Bhishma's chariot. All five brothers combined could not defeat Bhishma. Then the sun set and there was peace for the night.

In the eighth day's battle, Arjuna's son by his Naga wife, Iravana, was killed. Turning to Krishna, Arjuna, racked with

grief said, "I see now why Yudhisthira asked for only five villages. Had that obstinate cousin agreed, war could have been prevented and this ghastly, wicked killing not taken place. I have to fight on, otherwise I will be considered a coward."

On the ninth day, four Pandava brothers together attacked Bhishma, but they could not do anything against the endless stream of arrows from the old man. The Pandava army was retreating when Krishna who, with Arjuna, was on another side of the battlefield, pointed out the situation to Arjuna. "Arjuna, this is the day you brothers have been waiting for, and Bhishma is still alive. The army is in tatters. You must kill him. Remember what you vowed in Virata's court, 'Bhishma, Drona, whoever Duryodhana may send against us, I shall kill.' Remember."

Arjuna's answer was that he wished he was still in a forest in exile, instead of here, on the battlefield, having to kill the Pitamaha. "But drive into battle, Krishna, I shall do my duty." Again his heart was not in the combat, and in the meanwhile, Bhishma was creating havoc, and many superb warriors were shot down by him. Time after time, Arjuna shot Bhishma's bow to bits but he would pick up another and another, and the killing continued.

Krishna saw that Bhishma's skill had completely demoralised Arjuna, the Pandava army was nearly routed and this old man, lost in blood-lust and the glory of battle, seemed able to annihilate the whole force. Though Krishna's great skill in driving the chariot saved Arjuna, Bhishma remained triumphant.

"I cannot allow this," said Krishna and jumped down from the chariot. He was unarmed, and had only the driving whip in his hand, but as the Kuru army saw Krishna, dressed in golden yellow silk on the ground, hurtling towards Bhishma, they shouted, "He is dead, nothing can save him!"

Arjuna came running from behind and caught hold of Krishna, held him in his arms and tried to stop him, but Krishna's rage was such that he pushed Arjuna along as he strode forward. Then Arjuna fell on the ground and held on to Krishna's feet. "Come back, Krishna. Do not forget your own promise that you will not fight. Do not break your word. Do not let the world call you a liar. I swear by my weapons, by truth and the merit of my good deeds, I shall kill Bhishma. Leave this to me, do not raise your hand in anger."

Krishna stopped, turned back and, without saying a word to him, took up Arjuna's chariot reins again. The battle continued but by the time the sun set, the Pandavas were facing an extremely serious situation.

Krishna had a tremendous problem on his hands. Arjuna had sworn in open court, before all the Pandava allies and before the Kuru messenger. "Regardless of who it might be, Bhishma or Drona, I shall kill them on the battlefield." Arjuna, due not so much to lack of skill but of heart, had not been, and still was not able to defeat Bhishma and kill him. Only if Bhishma was killed could the Kurus be defeated. Yudhisthira was afraid of Bhishma's skill in battle and terrified of Karna's ability—even though Arjuna had defeated Karna in the battle of the kidnapping of Virata's cattle. Yudhisthira was demoralised because his army had suffered heavy losses. Then, Karna was reputed to possess some strange weapon which it was impossible to stand up against. It was said that Karna was keeping it only to kill Arjuna.

Krishna had said he would not take up arms in this war. His whole reputation of always being victorious, his plan for having a king who would rule under the laws of dharma was both in danger and in jeopardy.

That night, there was a conference among the Pandavas and their allies, particularly Krishna's clan leaders. Yudhisthira

was so disheartened that he felt that he ought to return to exile in the forest, rather than have his friends and relations slaughtered in the manner they were by Bhishma.

Krishna did his best both to console him, and to put some gumption in him, by even offering to take up arms for his sake. "If you feel that it is only the death of Bhishma that stands between you and victory, why, I can kill Bhishma." He pointed out that Arjuna could also do so, provided the will was strong enough. In any case, Arjuna's enemies were his, he considered Arjuna's duties to be his duties. "Arjuna is my Sakha, my brother-in-law and my friend."

Then Yudhisthira, rather hesitantly, told Krishna that before the war had started, Bhishma had told him that though he would have to fight on the Kurus' side, he would help with any advice Yudhisthira might need.

Krishna smiled and said, "Well, let us go and ask the Pitamaha's advice."

Without arms and on foot, the Pandava brothers and Krishna entered the Kuru camp and went to Bhishma. They held his feet and said, "We seek your protection." By this gesture, they formally sought sanctuary and so were quite safe even though they were in the enemy's camp.

They explained their problem. Bhishma was highly amused and delighted that they should want his advice on how to gain victory. He said they could not defeat him, so they had better make up their minds to kill him. They asked, "But how? You defeat everybody."

Laughing, Bhishma told them, "I must be made to put down my arms and not fight. These are the people I never fight: anyone who throws down his own arms; who may accidentally fall down; who throws away his armour; who pulls down his personal flag or pennant; who runs away; who is frightened; who surrenders; a woman, or any man whose

name may sound like that of a woman's; anyone who is distraught; who has only a single child, and a disreputable man. In your army you have Shikhandi. He was born a woman, all of you are aware of this fact. Let Arjuna put him in front and shoot at me from behind him. I shall not fight Shikhandi. This is one way of killing me."

They thanked him and left. On the way back, Arjuna spoke to Krishna about his extreme reluctance to kill the old man. The reasons were those of childhood memories and sentiments, but Krishna reminded him, "It was you who, in open court, vowed to kill him. You cannot go back on your word now. Besides, even if he is an old man, even if he is an elder relative, if he comes against you in battle it is your duty as a kshatriya to defeat him. Do not go against your dharma."

Arjuna later said he thought there must be something to this Shikhandi thing. "Whenever Shikhandi has attacked him, Bhishma has turned away and refused to stand and fight."

Next day, Arjuna kept all the Kuru warriors from coming to Bhishma's help, and Shikhandi attacked. At the same time Arjuna also shot at Bhishma. Eventually Bhishma fell from his chariot, so covered with arrows that his body could not touch the ground. The battle stopped, and everyone came to see the magnificent old warrior suspended on his bed of arrows. He said he was uncomfortable as his head was hanging. Everyone brought cushions and pillows—only Arjuna knew that his pillow could only be three arrows. Bhishma asked for water and Arjuna shot an arrow so deep that a fountain of water gushed out to quench Bhishma's thirst.

That day's war ended, and in the next few days the battles and fights were more and more bitter. The Kurus planned to capture Yudhisthira and failed, because Arjuna was guarding him. Eventually, he was challenged by thousands of warriors who swore, "Death to Arjuna or us!"—but Arjuna lived and

the battles continued.

Guru Drona had become the commander of the Kuru forces when Bhishma fell. He arranged the forces in a formation known as the Chakravyuha, or a circular formation. Arjuna was the only person who knew the secret of breaking into this formation, and he had been challenged by another lot of warriors with the same cry of, "Death to us or Arjuna." It had been a deliberate plan.

The Pandavas were in a terrible quandary when Arjuna's son, Abhimanyu, told them that he knew how to enter this formation but not how to get out of it. Yudhisthira said they would follow close behind so that he and the forces could enter together. But they were not able to keep up with Abhimanyu, as the Kurus fought back bitterly, and Jayadratha prevented anyone from following Abhimanyu. He fought on brilliantly. Then he was surrounded by nine warriors, including Drona and Karna. They destroyed his horses, charioteer, chariot, shot down all his weapons, but Abhimanyu still fought on. He picked up a chariot wheel as a weapon of defence and attack but, during the fight, he fell, and before he could get up fully on his feet, one of these warriors smashed his head from the back with a mace. For nine experienced warriors to attack and kill unarmed Abhimanyu, a young boy of sixteen, was against every code of kshatriya honour.

Arjuna had to be told about it in the evening, and after his initial sorrow, he was furiously angry and swore to kill the main culprit, Jayadratha, the next day "before the sun sets."

Once again, the tempestuous Arjuna had made a vow which would be difficult to fulfil. Once again Krishna was put in an impossible position. He had also to somehow console his bereaved sister, Subhadra.

The Kurus heard of Arjuna's vow and Drona promised to

save Jayadratha. He was to stay right in the rear.

Krishna laid his plans to take to arms himself if he found that Arjuna was unable to find and kill Jayadratha before sunset. He sent for his own charioteer, Daruka, and instructed him to keep his weapons ready in his chariot, and that if he heard Krishna blowing his unmistakable conch shell, Panchajanya, Daruka must rush the chariot to him.

Next morning the hunt for Jayadratha began. The Kurus tried, in every way possible, to stop Arjuna, but Krishna manoeuvred the chariot and penetrated deeper and deeper into their ranks. As the day advanced, and the time for the sun to set drew nearer, Krishna grew more determined to hurry on towards the rear. He warned Arjuna that Jayadratha was surrounded by six valiant warriors. How would they reach him in time? Then Krishna worked out, from signs and portents, that there would be an eclipse of the sun late in the evening. There were also low clouds on the horizon.

The colour of the sunlight changed, birds began to chatter, it looked as if it was evening and, as Krishna had predicted to Arjuna, Jayadratha appeared in front of his troops, triumphant that Arjuna had failed. Krishna called out, "There he is!" and the arrow shot out at the same moment, and Jayadratha's head was off his shoulders.

Joyfully, the friends embraced each other. Krishna said to Arjuna that when he defeated and killed Karna, that would be the day of real congratulations.

The battles went on. One day when the fighting was extra bitter, Bhima's son was fighting against Karna and, in the heat of the battle, Karna forgot that he was keeping his much cherished secret weapon to kill Arjuna, and used it against Bhima's son, whom he killed.

Krishna sighed with relief. That was one more danger over.

Drona's fighting power was still incredible and he remained undefeated. What could any of them do against him in skill of arms, when Drona was their Guru? Finally another stratagem was used. It was decided that if Drona were told his son had been killed, he would not fight any more out of grief. So, Bhima killed an elephant with the same name as Drona's son, Asvatthama, and yelled out to the Guru, "Asvatthama is dead."

Drona stopped fighting and threw down his arms, but still could not believe that an invincible fighter like his son, could have been killed. He said if Yudhisthira confirmed it, he would believe, "For Yudhisthira never tells a lie".

Bhima explained the situation to Yudhisthira, who was most reluctant to tell a lie. Bhima pleaded, and Krishna had to tell Yudhisthira that if Drona continued the way he was, there would be no Pandava army left in a couple of days. "To save lives it is not adharma to tell a lie."

Yudhisthira spoke the only lie of his life—"Asvatthama is dead", though he tried to save himself by adding, under his breath, "the elephant".

The tradition is that great rishis, in their ethereal subtle bodies, came to Drona and told him, "You are a brahmin. To go to war is against your dharma, and you have done cruel and ruthless things. It is not right that you should continue like this. Give up this body. Remember us and come away."

When Drona heard Yudhisthira telling him that Asvatthama was dead, he sat in final yoga and prepared to give up his life. Draupadi's brother rushed forward, and throwing his bow away, pulled out his sword and slashed Drona's head off. As he lifted his sword, Arjuna cried out, "Capture him alive! Do not kill the Guru!" But it was too late.

The terrible deeds continued, the battles went on, they forgot rules and codes. They fought all night long, and the

battlefield was turned into mud by the blood of the slain, as Balarama had predicted. Bhima tore open Dushasana's chest, cupped the blood in his hands and roared, in completion of the vow he had made when this man had tried to strip Draupadi.

On the seventeenth day of the war, the long-awaited final fight between Karna and Arjuna took place. Krishna knew of a place in the battlefield which was boggy. By brilliant manoeuvring, he pressured Karna's chariot into this area. Karna's chariot wheel got stuck in the mud. He forgot all the mantras he should have spoken before firing his deadly weapons. In despair, he told his charioteer, Salya, that he had been cursed by his Guru because he had deceived him by pretending that he was a brahmin. He had also killed a brahmin's cow by mistake and had been cursed to an ignominious death, "The curse is upon me," he said, as he leapt down to pull the wheel out of the mud. He begged Arjuna, in the name of dharma, not to shoot until his wheel was free. The more he tugged the deeper sank the wheel. Arjuna waited.

Krishna said, "Where was your dharma, Karna, when you taunted, mocked and insulted Draupadi, a helpless woman, in the open Kuru Sabha? Where was your dharma, Karna, when you connived with Sakuni to cheat in the dice game? And where, Karna, was your dharma when you, and eight other experienced warriors, surrounded the unarmed Abhimanyu and killed him by unfair means? Do not lay claim on dharma now, Karna. He deserves nothing, Arjuna, shoot him."

Before Arjuna's eyes rose the terrible moments of Draupadi in the Kuru Sabha and the face of his much-loved son. The arrow was shot and Karna was killed.

On the eighteenth day, after a tremendous battle, the Kurus were defeated. The war was over but Duryodhana had disappeared. He was tracked down to a lake where he was hid-

ing. Yudhisthira called him to come out but Duryodhana said he was tired, exhausted and Yudhisthira could have his kingdom. Yudhisthira said he wanted no gift, so he should come out and fight. "Take any one of us in single combat. Whoever wins takes the kingdom."

Duryodhana chose to fight a mace battle with Bhima.

Krishna was furious. He turned to Arjuna and said, "What has Yudhisthira said, what has he promised?"

Exasperated, he pointed out that this whole war, these hundreds and thousands killed in battle, would all be a total waste if Bhima did not win. For thirteen years Duryodhana had been practicing with the mace for this one moment, when he would have a single combat duel with Bhima. Bhima tried to reassure Krishna how strong he was, and that he would defeat Duryodhana. But Krishna was more than alarmed. He could see only disaster ahead of them all.

Before the duel began, Balarama arrived and sat down to watch it with the others.

The duel began and, after some time, Bhima was getting the worse of it. Krishna, in great anxiety, turned to Arjuna and said, "Bhima made a vow to break Duryodhana's thigh when he had pushed aside his garment, exposed his thighs and gestured to Draupadi. Remind him of his vow."

Arjuna slapped his own thigh, and just then Duryodhana leapt up in the air to do an intricate manoeuvre in mace fighting, and Bhima hit him a terrible blow which smashed his thighs.

As he fell, Bhima roared at him, "Foul wretch, do you remember how you behaved with Draupadi and what I had vowed at the time? This is now the consequence of your own actions," and Bhima kicked Duryodhana's head with his left foot.

Balarama stood up, scandalised, saying it was unfair in a

mace fight to hit below the navel.

Krishna said, "Let me remind you, brother, that the Shastras define conditions justifying actions for improvement or amelioration of situations. These are, one's own, those of one's friends and their relations, the downfall of their enemies and the downfall of the friends of one's enemy. A wise person should take immediate action to stop the downfall of one's friend because, by his fall, one's own destruction is certain." He pointed out that the Pandavas were their first cousins and they were in a critical position. Besides, the word of a kshatriya has always to be kept. Bhima had sworn to break Duryodhana's thigh.

Duryodhana had also insulted Maharishi Maitraya. He, too, had predicted and cursed him that Bhima would break his thigh in battle, because Duryodhana had rudely slapped his thigh in his presence when he came to advise him not to go to war. "Therefore, Bhima's action has not been wrong. Calm your anger."

"Greed and desire make people forget dharma, Krishna," Balarama said, "I am not convinced by what you say. Bhima was wrong. It was a foul."

Krishna again explained that Bhima had to keep his word, and that the Pandavas had to win by every means possible. He went on to say, "If one's friends are successful in their enterprise, whatever it might be, it is always beneficial to one's own self as well."

Unconvinced, Balarama got into his chariot and left for Dwarka.

Krishna turned to Yudhisthira and said, "Why do you permit Bhima to go on kicking the head of a man who has fallen in battle?"

Yudhisthira explained that none of this gave him any pleasure but the bitterness and anger in Bhima was finding expres-

sion. It was no use talking about morals and codes of behaviour in this situation. There was too much to remember and nothing had yet been forgotten.

When Duryodhana had gained some consciousness, he railed at Krishna, accusing him of being the prime agent for every victory that the Pandavas had won. "If the Pandava side had fought by strictly fair means, they would never have won. Krishna, you are the cause and means of the death of all the great warriors."

Krishna said, "Why add the pain of anger to the agony of wounds? Your own misdeeds have been the cause of your end." He reminded Duryodhana of his terrible wrongs, of his insults to Draupadi. How could the Pandavas forgive him? They asked for five villages and he had answered with "not a needle-point of land." If there had been wrongs and cruel deeds on this side, he was the prime cause and, because of his conduct all along, the Pandavas had been forced into various stratagems to regain their kingdom. Krishna said, "You have gained the end of a kshatriya—death on a battlefield. Go in peace."

To the end Duryodhana railed, "Krishna, I go to heaven. Your triumphs will be ashes in your mouth when all of you mourn your friends in desolate homes."

Later on, when Yudhisthira and the brothers were grieving, filled with remorse, Krishna told them that an enemy has to be destroyed by every means in one's power. Even by deceit, and when one is outnumbered, one has to resort to every type of stratagem.

"We have been successful. Victory is ours. Let us now rest."

After a while they all went to the Kuru camp. The Pandava brothers and Krishna were followed by all their main commanders. They took over the camp, the jewels, the clothes;

the hangings, the enormous wealth of Duryodhana. The warriors were excited and pleased, and an uproar of boisterous voices filled the grieving camp. Krishna advised that both the Pandava brothers and his own people, should not stay in the camp just at present, for there were too many resentful people and servants still around.

Yudhisthira and the rest of them camped near the river. He asked Krishna to go to Hastinapur and inform the old King about the outcome of the war. Krishna agreed and left.

Duryodhana was still alive when the only three of his commanders still alive, tracked him down to where he lay. Seeing him in the terrible condition he was in, Guru Drona's son, Asvatthama, vowed a revenge and vengeance on all the Pandavas. With formal words, Duryodhana made him commander of the Kuru forces, so that whatever action he took theoretically, he was chief of the enemy forces.

The three commanders left but, as they were all totally exhausted, they decided to sleep for a while. They were lying under a tree, when Asvatthama saw an owl attack roosting and sleeping birds in the tree. From this, he got the idea to attack the Pandava camp at night, immediately, and kill them while they slept.

They reached and entered the sleeping camp, for it was unguarded, and killed and killed whoever they could. All Draupadi's five sons by her five husbands were killed, and her brother who had killed the Guru, as well.

The five brothers, Krishna and his people were not in the camp so they escaped this assault. But by not being present, they also could not prevent this midnight massacre, which was against the code of battle at that time.

Having killed as many commanders and soldiers as they could, the three went to Duryodhana who heard the news, congratulated them, and died.

When Draupadi heard of the death of her sons, she called for revenge, and Bhima left to find Asvatthama wherever he might be.

Krishna, once again involved in the affairs of the impetuous Pandavas, called to Arjuna and Yudhisthira to come with him, and left to protect Bhima. They caught up with him, and found Asvatthama in Veda Vyasa's ashram.

In their confrontation with him, Asvatthama used a mantra, and saying, "May the whole clan of Pandavas be destroyed", let loose the Brahmasira weapon.

It is not possible for the contemporary mind to understand what this weapon was but, from the description in the Mahabharata, it reads as if the effect of it was like some kind of nuclear fission, with its heat and fire and blaze that reached up higher and higher into the skies.

Arjuna, too, had been taught by Drona, and Krishna told him to use the weapon which could destroy it. When Arjuna launched his weapon, the Mahabharata says, "The skies exploded into fire and flame, the earth trembled and mankind was terrified."

Narada Muni and Veda Vyasa came to the scene and ordered that these weapons be retracted. "Surely the Guru told you never to use this against any human, Arjuna?" Arjuna pleaded that it was only to stop Asvatthama's weapon and not to hurt him, that he had launched it. He retracted, but Asvatthama could not retract his, and once launched, this weapon, or the power of the mantra, had to be directed somewhere. Asvatthama directed the power of the destructive mantra to the wombs of the Pandava women.

There was an argument between Krishna and Asvatthama. Krishna told him that he was guilty of killing unborn children. It was the greatest sin and as he was a brahmin his sin.

and crime were both of greater gravity. "The world will condemn you, Asvatthama. You will wander homeless, unwanted, ashamed to show your face anywhere."

"But the Pandava clan is finished, that is what I wanted and I have achieved it."

Krishna told him that a child *would* be born, and even though born dead, would live and rule for many years, with the name Parikshit."

Krishna and the Pandavas returned to their camp to learn that the old King was on his way to the battle ground, and to the river bank.

Here, they all met. Krishna realised that the old King was in a murderous rage against Bhima and so, when the King moved to embrace him, Krishna pushed forward an iron statue of Bhima, on which Duryodhana used to practice with his mace. The old blind King crushed the statue in his anger and rage, as he held it in his arms in an embrace. Krishna rebuked him for his senseless rage and the King regretted everything. His rage was over. He was old, bereft, and wept in the arms of his nephews.

The King's wife Gandhari, had lost all her sons. Her rage, too, was great against the Pandavas and Veda Vyasa did his best to calm her. Tradition says that her scorching, angry eyes saw one of Yudhisthira's toes and it was burnt black.

The final sadness was when she and Draupadi met. Trying to console her, for she, too, had lost all her sons, Gandhari said, "Who can understand our grief, who can give us solace? But mine is the worst fault of all, for it is I who gave birth to those who have been the cause of the destruction of our great tribe."

The Pandavas, helped by Krishna and Veda Vyasa, per-

formed the funeral ceremonies. The Pandavas lived for a month on the banks of the Ganges in penance. Then, at long last, Krishna took Yudhisthira to Hastinapur to rule his kingdom.



After Yudhisthira had begun to reign, Krishna went with Arjuna to Indraprastha and stayed with him there for some months. While he was there, he repeated the philosophical truths of the Gita. This is known as the Anu-Gita. Then Krishna felt he should return to Dwarka to visit his father. Arjuna persuaded him to first come with him to Hastinapur to meet Yudhisthira, before he left for Dwarka.

Yudhisthira was going to do the Aswamedha Yajna, the horse sacrifice, where the horse is left to roam as it will, and should anyone stop it, they must fight the accompanying army. It was another way to acquire imperial status and levy tribute from princes and kings. Arjuna was to be in charge of the forces that would accompany the horse.

Krishna promised Yudhisthira that he would return for the

yajna and set out for Dwarka. On the way he met an old friend of his, the Maharishi Utanka.

The Maharishi had not heard about the actual battle and when Krishna told him of the result, and the deaths of all the Kurus, the Rishi was very angry with Krishna. He held that Krishna had the power to stop the war but did not, so he deserved to be cursed.

Krishna explained his stand saying he had used every kind of persuasion, he had even used threats, but it had all been to no avail.

Utanka again said, "You have every virtue, every power. Why did you not use it? You were indifferent to their fate."

Krishna explained that it was not indifference, but as a man, he had to act only as a human being.

By this, Krishna implied that whatever may be the role of the absolute or the Divine, he was in the world as a human being and so acted as one, and as perfectly as humanly possible, in each and every role.

He ended by saying, "A price has to be paid for all unrighteousness. Cruel and rapacious, blinded by greed, these Kuru men were the cause of their own destruction by their own acts. I tried to save them, but their own fate rushed them to their doom."

Krishna was forgiven by the Maharishi and as he went on to Dwarka, he remembered the scene with Gandhari, Duryodhana's mother.

She, too, had accused him of being indifferent to the fate of the Kurus and the war. She had said, "Krishna, you allowed the Pandavas and the Kurus to destroy each other. You possess every quality, you have every kind of power. You never used it, you did not stop them. You must pay for this. I say that you will destroy your own relations and clan. You will see them destroying each other, and stand by, helpless.

Then, without any child of your own, friendless, alone in a forest, you shall die a mean death. Thirty-six years from now, what I say will come true."

Krishna had smiled and answered, "Who but I can destroy my invincible clan, lady? It will be just as you say, since it is all already pre-ordained."

Krishna was taking Subhadra with him to Dwarka to meet her parents and to console her after her son's death. After a few months, he and Subhadra returned to Hastinapur. Subhadra's daughter-in-law, Uttara, (Abhimanyu's widow) was due to have a child, and this child was the last hope for the continuation of the Pandava family, since all the sons had been killed.

Krishna arrived in Hastinapur and met everyone. Subhadra had gone in and Krishna had just sat down when news was brought that, prematurely, a son had been born to Uttara, but the conch shells had hardly sounded when the midwives and women all saw that the child was still-born and not breathing. The women began to cry and wail. Hearing this, Krishna accompanied by some others, hurried to the inner apartments.

The Pandava mother, Kunti, Draupadi and Subhadra all begged Krishna to come quickly to the room where the child had been born. Kunti said, "You must help us, Krishna. There will be no one to do the funeral ceremonies for us if this child does not live."

The Mahabharata says, Krishna went with them towards the room and, as he neared it, he did not get the feeling of death surrounding the room.

Subhadra entreated him, "Brother, help us, I have lost my son, give me back my grandson." Uttara dragged herself from the bed and fell at Krishna's feet, "Only you can help us. When Asvatthama had directed his dreadful mantra to my

womb you had told him, my child will live, for you will save him. Help us now."

Again and again, the women begged and entreated him. Subhadra said, "You are always a truthful man, do not break your word. Save this child." Uttara held on to his feet and wept her heart out.

Then Krishna spoke loudly to Uttara, "No, I never speak an untruth. The child shall live, I shall bring your child to life." He took some water in his hand and saying, "I am ever a truthful person, dharma is established in me, I have never turned my back to any attacking enemy, I have destroyed the unrighteous and I have always respected the brahmins who are wise. By the strength of all these, let Abhimanyu's dead child come to life." As he spoke these words and sprinkled the water that was in his hand to destroy the effect of Asvatthama's destructive mantra, the child stirred.

The story of the lifting of Govardhana mountain is a miracle since it is part of a religious mystique but it can be explained to the enquiring mind, and so can the story of the Kaliya serpent. These are all poetic allegories blended into the religious mystique of the Hindus and the myths and culture of a people. But the life-giving, or revival, of Uttara's child is something different and cannot be explained away as being any of these. The incident is narrated as plain fact and the contemporary mind has, therefore, to find an answer and explanation which has nothing to do with allegories, poetry, religion or myth.

This incident of Uttara's child being brought back to life, showed and proved the enormous power of Absolute Truth, or Satya. This truth has to be lived in thought, speech and action. If this absolute is never broken, if the absolute of right action and your own dharma, in whatever status you may be, is never broken, if all the duties enjoined upon you are

fulfilled, then your speech has infinite power, because it is in yoga with the powers of nature, or the natural powers that maintain creation.

No true yogi ever wishes to use this power, and Krishna only used it because he decided that it was his own given word that had to be fulfilled.

It was not Divinity which acted and brought the child to breathe and live, but the great yogi, Krishna, the man of truth in thought, speech and action.

During the battle of Kurukshetra, there are two occasions when Krishna leaps down from his chariot to kill Bhishma. He is totally unarmed and yet he says, "I will kill him." The second time he has just his whip in his hand.

It is of interest to recollect that, in Kerala, there is still a minute survival of the martial art of India in the 'Kalarippayatt'. This word is made up of two Malayalam words, *kaloori* meaning gymnasium, and *payatt* meaning combat.

There is a legend that unarmed combat originated in India and went to Japan with the teachers, acharyas and monks who went from Nalanda University to China and the Far East. If one accepts this, then it is understandable why the Kuru army was terrified when they saw Krishna striding unarmed towards Bhishma. If Krishna was an invincible warrior, he must also have been a complete expert in unarmed combat, and so Bhishma's death would have been certain.

It should be remembered that Krishna explained to Maharishi Utanka, that he was born a man and so always acted as a human. He, therefore, never used any powers that could be called "divine".

Even the killing of Kamsa's wrestlers, and Kamsa himself, could be attributed to skill in unarmed combat, which possibly was taught in every village gymnasium, or *akhara*, in those times.

After Yudhisthira's magnificent Aswamedha Yajna was over, Krishna returned to Dwarka. The years went by. Once, during that time there was an eclipse of the sun, with the planets in a rare position. Krishna, with a great many Yadavas, went on a pilgrimage to bathe in the ponds at Kurukshetra. Nanda and his clan had also come. Krishna met Nanda, Yashoda, the gopas and the gopis once again. The Bhagavata says, he initiated them all in the yoga of meditation before he returned to Dwarka.

One day, Krishna observed certain peculiar natural phenomena taking place. He made astrological calculations, and found that this was the thirty-sixth year after the war. The destruction of the Yadavas was to come true. The astrological, and astronomical positions of the planets were the same as at the time of the Kurukshetra war. In a few days' time the fourteenth and fifteenth days of the moon coincided with the same twenty-four hours, exactly as they had on the day the war started.

The traditional, and Bhagavata, story is that one evening, Krishna was sitting on his balcony and he saw in the sky, the heavenly hosts. Brahma spoke to him and said, "Return, there is nothing further for you to do."

Krishna gave instructions that all old men, women and children must leave the island of Dwarka. The Yadava men must all go on pilgrimage to Pravasa on the conjunction of the fourteenth and the fifteenth day of the moon. Food must be prepared beforehand and taken with them.

Earlier, some years before this, three rishis had come to Dwarka. A few of the young men had thought it a good joke for one of them to go dressed as a pregnant woman, and ask the rishis whether the child would be a boy or a girl. The rishis looked at them, frowned and said, what would be delivered would be a mace and would destroy the whole lot of them.

And then they left.

The boy had in fact, tied a mace to his body to make the bulge of the so-called pregnant woman, and now they were all terrified. They went to King Ugrasena and confessed the whole incident. He ordered the mace to be reduced to powder and thrown into the sea. The mace was rubbed and rubbed into powder by filing and then thrown into the sea. However, there was one piece left, which could not be powdered so it was thrown into the sea as it was. After the rains the seashore at Pravasa was covered with a variety of very tough, strong reeds.

When King Ugrasena was told that the rishis had also predicted that the Yadavas would destroy each other by the mace in a quarrel and fight among themselves, he had given strict orders that no Yadava was to drink wine any more. Neither was it to be made in any house. The punishment for any infringement would be very severe. He hoped that with all these precautions, he would be able to nullify the rishis' curse and prediction. Yet, when Krishna gave the order for all the male Yadavas to go to Pravasa, with cooked food for all, they decided to take along some wine as well. Pots, jugs and jars of it were taken, in spite of the strict orders against either making or drinking it.

The Yadavas were in a boisterous mood. There was food, they had taken wine, and the seashore was a pleasant area. They began to enjoy themselves and drink. Quarrels broke out and arguments : what so and so had done in some battle during the war. From words, the quarrel led to hitting each other, and suddenly it all became a raging, murderous fight. They struck each other with whatever they could find. They even tore up the reeds and used them as lances and spears. At first, Krishna had tried to reason with them, then he commanded them to stop. No one listened. He saw his beloved

friend, Satyaki, being surrounded and attacked. Before he could do anything, his son Pradyumna, jumped into the fight and was overwhelmed.

Dead bodies strewed the seashore. Krishna's companion and friend, Satyaki, was dead; all Krishna's sons died, killed in this senseless fratricidal battle. Krishna watched for some time, then he picked up a clump of *arka* grass, and with a mantra, threw it towards the drunken raging mob, saying, "Then die."

He walked away to a nearby forest. There, he found Balarama sitting under a tree in the position of yoga, and Krishna knew that Balarama was in his final Yoga Samadhi, and would soon give up this body.

Krishna moved away and sat down under a tree, with his legs stretched out and his feet crossed, thinking.

A hunter was in the forest, looking for deer. He would sell the venison meat. He thought to himself, if he could only see a deer, he would kill it, definitely with one arrow-shot. He had made this arrow-head from an extraordinary piece of iron found inside the stomach of a large fish. This arrow was going to find him his food today. "Something is in the forest over there," he said to himself, "it has moved". He drew the bowstring back and shot his arrow, then followed it up, running. When he reached the clearing, he saw a person dressed in golden yellow silk, lying on the ground with the arrow shot straight through his foot.

The hunter begged and pleaded forgiveness—"I thought it was a deer." Krishna forgave him and told him to go.

Soon after the hunter had gone, Krishna's charioteer, Daruka, came looking for him. Krishna tried to console him, but told him not to waste time grieving. He must inform people in Dwarka of all that had happened here, and then go as fast as he could to Arjuna, and tell him that he was to come

quickly and take the women, children and old people away from Dwarka, because Dwarka would disappear into the sea, in seven days' time.

Vasudeva, Devaki and Rohini came with Daruka to where the bodies lay. Seeing Krishna and Balarama's lifeless bodies, the shock and sorrow was too much for them and they too, died.

Arjuna came and performed the last rites of Vasudeva's and Krishna's funeral. He managed to remove the women, children and old men to the mainland, just in time. Then, on the day of the highest tide of the year, the sea rose higher and higher. Beautiful Dwarka, with her golden spires, sank into the sea and not a trace of the city-state remained.

There is a concluding story about the hunter and why Krishna was shot and killed by him. First, the arrow-head the hunter had used was made of the last piece of the rishi-cursed mace, which was thrown into the sea and which had been swallowed by a fish, or maybe a shark.

Secondly, long, long ago when Rama, son of King Dasharatha, was watching the battle between Bali and Sugriva, he saw that his friend Sugriva was losing, and so, shot Bali.

Bali's son, Angada, was furiously angry with Rama for interfering in a single combat, and then killing his father. When Rama found Angada glaring at him, he said he knew that Angada would like to kill him—"You will do it in a future life, far in the distance."

Angada was the hunter and Rama's word had come true.

As an epilogue: Arjuna brought back Krishna's wives and his great-grandson, Bajranabha, with him to Hastinapur. There, Bajranabha was made the ruler of Mathura and all its adjoining lands, and sent to Mathura.

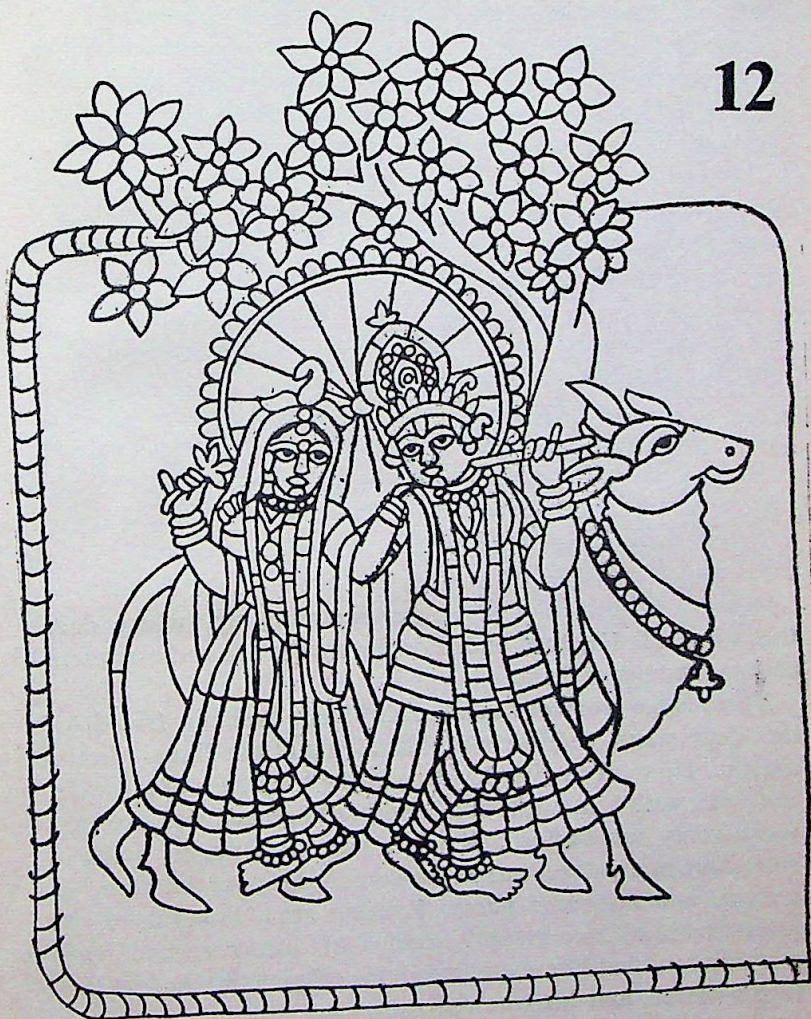
Soon after this, Yudhisthira and the Pandava brothers

decided to take sannyasa, and prepare themselves spiritually for the end of their earthly life. They installed Arjuna's grandson, Parikshit, as ruler at Hastinapur and left for the Himalayas.

Parikshit went to visit Bajranabha and Krishna's widows, and to ask if there was anything he could do to help Krishna's family. Bajranabha complained that there were no inhabitants, no villages, nothing, in this area. Parikshit sent for Sandilya Muni, who had been the guru of the Nanda clan, to tell them about the old places in Krishna's time. He told them the names and showed them the exact places where the villages were in Krishna's time.

These villages still exist today. Dirghapur, known as Deeg today; Mahavana, known as Gokula to this day; Nandigram which is Nandgaon, and Brihatsanu called Barsana.

Parikshit sent villagers, merchants and people from his kingdom to rehabilitate the land where Krishna had lived till he left for Dwarka.



*I*n summing up, where does the story of Krishna end? For the stories are endless, there are any number of them.

There is the story of Sudama, Krishna's brahmin friend, of the days when they were both students at Sandipani Muni's ashram. He went to visit Krishna at the insistence of his wife, and took with him a gift of a handful of parched rice, for that was all they could afford. Krishna was in Dwarka, living in splendour in a palace, but he welcomed the poor brahmin as a friend and honoured guest. Krishna ate a handful of the gift of parched rice happily, and with pleasure, and when Sudama returned home, he found his dilapidated hut turned into a palace, and his wife rich.

Krishna saved them from poverty as he saved Draupadi in her hour of need.

Another story is: Bhrigu Rishi wanted to find out who was really compassionate and loving of the triad of Brahma, Vishnu and Maheshwar-Shiva. He was rude to Brahma, who was furious; he spoke scathingly to Shiva who raised his trident to kill the rishi; then he went to Krishna, found him asleep, and he kicked him on the chest to wake him.

Krishna leapt out of bed and held the rishi's leg and began rubbing his foot, saying he hoped he had not hurt it, how stupid of him, Krishna, to be asleep when the rishi had so kindly come to visit him.

Stories with morals, all beautifully told and carried down the centuries, with characters and venues changing, so to what place shall the story of Krishna be confined?

There is the enormous temple of Jagannath, in Puri. The images are quite the most absurd things. But there is also laughter rocking round the temple. How absurd to expect to see the Lord of the Universes with human eyes! If one wishes to have an image, then any image is good enough, even this. The story is that the original was a Neel Madhava, a Blue Krishna, made of a solid block of sapphire, which was deep in a forest. No one could get near it. Eventually, when the King of Puri reached deep into the forest, there was nothing there. The story continues that, later, he had a dream in which three blocks of wood were thrown up by the sea. In confirmation of his dream a strange sculptor appeared and, as mysteriously, he disappeared—all that was left were the original prototypes of what there is today in the temple.

In Puri, within the temple premises no orthodoxy and bigotry are permitted. There is no caste, no rich, no poor. In the precincts of the Lord of the Universes, all are one.

Pushing away the clutter of mis-readings and ignorance, Krishna can be seen to be a lovable child, with a gay boyhood, who grows into a man of infinite charm and personality.

gracious and well-mannered. A statesman, diplomat, warrior and strategist.

Each person can find in the character of Krishna a dominant factor. But that dominance is, actually, a mirror of that particular person's dominant characteristic and inclination of mind. Krishna had every quality in a full and totally balanced measure.

If the end of the story is devastatingly sad, it must be seen from the point of view that Krishna's work on earth was over. If a trace of past Karma still clung rather like the stickiness of a sweet held in the hand, then that Karma had to have the end-action to the original cause. What had happened in Rama's time was washed away by Krishna. The killing of Bali is atoned by Krishna's death at the hands of the hunter.

When was Krishna born, how long did he live and when did he die, are questions that arise.

Krishna was born on the eighth day of the dark half of the moon in the month of Bhadra—which approximates the half month of August and September. He lived for one hundred and twenty-five years, and gave up his bodily life on a Wednesday, on the eighth day of the dark half of the moon in the month of Bhadra. Recently, historians have said that according to astronomical calculations the Mahabharata war took place in the 15th century B.C.; Puranic data points to the 10th or 9th centuries B.C.; archeological evidence, apparently, also points to this date; whereas another school of thought puts it at about 1000 B.C.

In the Gita, Krishna says: "I am in all that happens." Regardless of how we destroy matter, Creative and Cosmic Intelligence, the Absolute, remains. Even when the body is reduced to earth and ashes, the consciousness of Intelligence remains in it. Nothing is devoid of Cosmic Intelligence. So it is logical to say, Consciousness is immortal. It is in this

context that the word immortality can be used, for nothing is ever destroyed, neither action nor matter. But it is not easy to realise the actual fact of this immortality. Only those who fully understand and realise this, as a living reality, are the rishis, munis, the Realised Ones.

Science and metaphysics have caught up with each other today and constructive research is being done to see whether science can corroborate the sayings of the ancient rishis, and whether the findings of contemporary science have their counterpart in the old sayings of India, its teachings and the cryptic stanzas of the Vedas.

Krishna has any number of names. Each one has not only a different meaning, but it is used at different times to depict, or highlight, a different aspect of knowledge. So, by knowing the meanings of these names, one's knowledge of what Krishna means becomes clearer.

The name Krishna itself has been given any number of meanings, because single letters hold meanings within themselves. Thus, one meaning says: 'Krish' means faith, and the sound of the letter 'N' indicates the devotion of a devotee; therefore, Krishna is he who is the Lord of faith and devotion.

Another interpretation says: 'Krish' covers everything and the 'N' sound is the seed letter from which all grows, so Krishna is the Lord of the field of all possibilities: That, from which everything grows and is created. Another name for this is Cosmic Intelligence.

Golaka-Bihari, or Golaka-Vihari, is another name for Krishna. This means: Krishna wanders everywhere and nowhere for he is whole and complete. The Upanishada says:

It moves, it moves not,
It is far, it is near,

It is within everything and outside everything that is.

The Puranas say, that whenever the balance of dharma is upset, Narayana appears to restore it.

When the anti-gods "put on the robes of princes and the anti-gods take on the role of rulers," the balance is upset and Narayana comes to help the righteous, the humble, and those who walk on the path of holiness and dharma.

Because the yuga was changing and the Kali Yuga was on its way, Narayana took birth as Krishna and lived a life which would be spoken about and remembered down the centuries and the ages of the Kali Yuga.

The Puranas also say, to listen to the names and the stories about Krishna calms the mind, helps those who are oppressed by the weight of the iniquities of the Kali Yuga and heals the heart of the sad. It brings pleasure and joy in its wake, for Krishna is love incarnate.

In the Gita, Krishna says, "Whenever the balance of dharma is upset, I appear." Krishna appears to humans who are awake with the weight of dharma balanced within them. This, actually, is the true avatara : a human working, moving, thinking in Truth and Dharma, and also absolutely aware of what is dharma and truth.

In the end, what is love, and why call Krishna, Love Incarnate?

Love is wisdom, warmth and light—maybe, the light of hope for one's own self, and for the world outside one's solitary, lonely and alone, self.

Sometimes certain words remain in one's memory, to savour: "Love is the divinity who creates peace among men. Love sings to all things which live and are, soothing the troubled minds of gods and men."

Veena

